

# THE OPERA

R. A. STREATFEILD



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## INTRODUCTION

If Music be, among the arts, 'Heaven's youngest-teemed star', the latest of the art-forms she herself has brought forth is unquestionably Opera. Three hundred years does not at first seem a very short time, but it is not long when it covers the whole period of the inception, development, and what certainly looks like the decadence, of an important branch of man's artistic industry. The art of painting has taken at least twice as long to develop; yet the three centuries from Monteverde to Debussy cover as great a distance as that which separates Cimabue from Degas. In operatic history, revolutions, which in other arts have not been accomplished in several generations, have got themselves completed, and indeed almost forgotten, in the course of a few years. Twenty-five years ago, for example, Wagner's maturer works were regarded, by the more charitable of those who did not admire them, as intelligible only to the few enthusiasts who had devoted years of study to the unravelling of their mysteries; the world in general looked askance at the 'Wagnerians', as they were called, and professed to consider the shyly-confessed admiration of the amateurs as a mere affectation. In that time we have seen the tables turned, and now there is no more certain way for a manager to secure a full house than by announcing one of these very works. An even shorter period covers the latest Italian renaissance of music, the feverish excitement into which the public was thrown by one of its most blatant productions, and the collapse of a set of composers who were at one time hailed as regenerators of their country's art.

But though artistic conditions in opera change quickly and continually, though reputations are made and lost in a few years, and the real reformers of music themselves alter their style and methods so radically that the earlier compositions of a Gluck, a Wagner, or a Verdi present scarcely any point of resemblance to those later masterpieces by which each of these is immortalised, yet the attitude of audiences towards opera in general changes curiously little from century to century; and plenty of modern parallels might be found, in London and elsewhere, to the story which tells of the delay in producing 'Don Giovanni' on account of the extraordinary vogue of Martini's 'Una Cosa Rara', a work which only survives because a certain tune from it is brought into the supper-scene in Mozart's opera.

There is a good deal of fascination, and some truth, in the theory that different nations enjoy opera in different ways. According to this, the Italians consider it solely in relation to their sensuous emotions; the French, as producing a titillating sensation more or less akin to the pleasures of the table; the Spaniards, mainly as a vehicle for dancing; the Germans, as an intellectual pleasure; and the English, as an expensive but not unprofitable way of demonstrating financial prosperity. The Italian might be said to hear through what is euphemistically called his heart, the Frenchman through his palate, the Spaniard through his toes, the German through his brain, and the Englishman through his purse. But in truth this does not represent the case at all fairly. For, to take only modern instances, Italy, on whose congenial soil 'Cavalleria Rusticana' and the productions it suggested met with such extraordinary success, saw also in 'Falstaff' the wittiest and most brilliant musical comedy since 'Die Meistersinger', and in 'Madama Butterfly' a lyric of infinite delicacy, free from any suggestion of unworthy emotion. Among recent French operas, works of tragic import, treated with all the intricacy of the most advanced modern schools, have been received with far greater favour than have been shown to works of the lighter class which we associate with the genius of the French nation; and of late years the vogue of such works as 'Louise' or 'Pelléas et Mélisande' shows that the taste for music without any special form has conquered the very nation in which form has generally ranked highest. In Germany, on the other hand, some of the greatest successes with the public at large have been won by productions which seem to touch the lowest imaginable point of artistic imbecility; and the ever-increasing interest in musical drama that is manifested year after year by London audiences shows that higher motives than those referred to weigh even with Englishmen. The theory above mentioned will not hold water, for there are, as a matter of fact, only two ways of looking at opera: either as a means, whether expensive or not, of passing an evening with a very little intellectual trouble, some social *éclat*, and a certain amount of pleasure, or as a form of art, making serious and justifiable claims on the attention of rational people. These claims of opera are perhaps more widely recognised in England than they were some years ago; but there are still a certain number of persons, and among them not a few musical people, who hesitate to give opera a place beside what is usually called 'abstract' music. Music's highest dignity is, no doubt, reached when it is self-sufficient, when its powers are exerted upon its own creations, entirely without dependence upon predetermined emotions calling for illustration, and when the interest of the composition as well as the material is conveyed exclusively in terms of music. But the function of music in expressing those sides of human emotion which lie too deep for verbal utterance, a function of which the gradual recognition led on to the invention of opera, is one that cannot be slighted or ignored; in it lies a power of appeal to feeling that no words can reach, and a very wonderful definiteness in conveying exact shades of emotional sensation. Not that it can of itself suggest the direction in which the emotions are to be worked upon; but this direction once given from outside, whether by a 'programme' read by the listener or by the action and accessories of the stage, the force of feeling can be conveyed with overwhelming power, and the whole gamut of emotion, from the subtlest hint or foreshadowing to the fury of inevitable passion, is at the command of him who knows how to wield the means by which expression is carried to the hearer's mind. And in this fact—for a fact it is—lies the completest justification of opera as an art-form. The old-fashioned criticism of opera as such, based on the indisputable fact that, however excited people may be, they do not in real life express themselves in song, but in unmodulated speech, is not now very often heard. With the revival in England of the dramatic instinct, the conventions of stage declamation are readily accepted, and if it be conceded that the characters in a drama may be allowed to speak blank verse, it is hardly more than a step further to permit the action to be carried on by means of vocal utterance in music. Until latterly, however, English people, though taking pleasure in the opera, went to it rather to hear particular singers than to enjoy the work as a whole, or with any consideration for its dramatic significance. We should not expect a stern and uncompromising nature like Carlyle's to regard the opera as anything more than a trivial amusement, and that such was his attitude towards it appears from his letters; but it is curious to see that a man of such strongly pronounced dramatic tastes as Edward FitzGerald, though devoted to the opera in his own way, yet took what can only be called a superficial view of its possibilities.

The Englishman who said of the opera, 'At the first act I was enchanted; the second I could just bear; and at the third I ran away', is a fair illustration of an attitude common in the eighteenth century; and in France things were not much better, even in days when stage magnificence reached a point hardly surpassed in history. La Bruyère's 'Je ne sais comment l'opéra avec une musique si parfaite, et une dépense toute royale, a pu réussir à m'ennuyer', shows how little he had realised the fatiguing effect of theatrical splendour too persistently displayed. St. Evrémonde finds juster cause for his bored state of mind in the triviality of the subject-matter of operas, and his words are worth quoting at some length: 'La langueur ordinaire où je tombe aux opéras, vient de ce que je n'en ai jamais vu qui ne m'ait paru méprisable dans la disposition du sujet, et dans les vers. Or, c'est vainement que l'oreille est flattée, et que les yeux sont charmés, si l'esprit ne se trouve pas satisfait; mon âme d'intelligence avec mon esprit plus qu'avec mes sens,

forme une résistance aux impressions qu'elle peut recevoir, ou pour le moins elle manque d'y prêter un consentement agréable, sans lequel les objets les plus voluptueux même ne sauraient me donner un grand plaisir. Une sottise chargée de musique, de danses, de machines, de décorations, est une sottise magnifique; c'est un vilain fonds sous de beaux dehors, où je pénètre avec beaucoup de désagrément.'

The cant phrase in use in FitzGerald's days, 'the lyric stage', might have conveyed a hint of the truth to a man who cared for the forms of literature as well as its essence. For, in its highest development, opera is most nearly akin to lyrical utterances in poetry, and the most important musical revolution of the present century has been in the direction of increasing, not diminishing, the lyrical quality of operatic work. The Elizabethan writers—not only the dramatists, but the authors of romances—interspersed their blank verse or their prose narration with short lyrical poems, just as in the days of Mozart the airs and concerted pieces in an opera were connected by wastes of recitative that were most aptly called 'dry'; and as it was left to a modern poet to tell, in a series of lyrics succeeding one another without interval, a dramatic story such as that of *Maud*, so was it a modern composer who carried to completion, in 'Tristan und Isolde', the dramatic expression of passion at the highest point of lyrical utterance. It is no more unnatural for the raptures of Wagner's lovers, or the swan-song of ecstasy, to be sung, than for the young man whose character Tennyson assumes, to utter himself in measured verse, sometimes of highly complex structure. The two works differ not in kind, but in degree of intensity, and to those whose ears are open to the appeal of music, the power of expression in such a case as this is greater beyond all comparison than that of poetry, whether declaimed or merely read. That so many people recognise the rational nature of opera in the present day is in great measure due to Wagner, since whose reforms the conventional and often idiotic libretti of former times have entirely disappeared. In spite of the sneers of the professed anti-Wagnerians, which were based as often as not upon some ineptitude on the part of the translator, not upon any inherent defect in the original, the plots invented by Wagner have won for themselves an acceptance that may be called world-wide. And whatever be the verdict on his own plots, there can be no question as to the superiority of the average libretto since his day. No composer dare face the public of the present day with one of the pointless, vapid sets of rhymes, strung together with intervals of bald recitative, that pleased our forefathers, and equally inconceivable is the re-setting of libretti that have served before, in the manner of the eighteenth century composers, a prodigious number of whom employed one specially admired 'book' by Metastasio.

Unfortunately those who take an intelligent interest in opera do not even yet form a working majority of the operatic audience in any country. While the supporters of orchestral, choral, or chamber music consist wholly of persons, who, whatever their degree of musical culture, take a serious view of the art so far as they can appreciate it, and therefore are unhampered by the necessity of considering the wishes of those who care nothing whatever about the music they perform. In connection with every operatic enterprise the question arises of how to cater for a great class who attend operatic performances for any other reason rather than that of musical enjoyment, yet without whose pecuniary support the undertaking must needs fail at once. Nor is it only in England that the position is difficult. In countries where the opera enjoys a Government subsidy, the influences that make against true art are as many and as strong as they are elsewhere. The taste of the Intendant in a Germantown, or that of the ladies of his family, may be on such a level that the public of the town, over the operatic arrangement of which he presides, may very well be compelled to hear endless repetitions of flashy operas that have long passed out of every respectable repertory; and in other countries the Government official within whose jurisdiction the opera falls may, and very often does, enforce the engagement of some musically incompetent prima donna in whom he, or some scheming friend, takes a particular interest.

The moral conditions of the operatic stage are no doubt far more satisfactory than they were, and in England the general deodorisation of the theatre has not been unfelt in opera; but even without the unworthy motives which too often drew the bucks and the dandies of a past day to the opera-house, the influence of the unintelligent part of the audience upon the performers is far from good in an artistic sense. It is this which fosters that mental condition with which all who are acquainted with the operatic world are only too familiar. Now, just as in the days when Marcello wrote his *Teatro alla moda*, there is scarcely a singer who does not hold, and extremely few who do not express, the opinion that all the rest of the profession is in league against them; and by this supposition, as well as by many other circumstances, an atmosphere is created which is wholly antagonistic to the attainment of artistic perfection. All honour is due to the purely artistic singers who have reached their position without intrigue, and whose influence on their colleagues is the best stimulus to wholesome endeavour. It is beyond question that the greater the proportion of intelligent hearers in any audience or set of subscribers, the higher will the standard be, not only in vocalisation, but in that combination which makes the artist as distinguished from the mere singer. For every reason, too, it is desirable that opera should be given, as a general rule, in the language of the country in which the performance takes place, and although the system of giving each work with its own original words is an ideally perfect one for trained hearers, yet the difficulties in the way of its realisation, and the absurdities that result from such expedients as a mixture of two or more languages in the same piece, render it practically inexpedient for ordinary operatic undertakings. The recognition of English as a possible medium of vocal expression may be slow, but it is certainly making progress, and in the last seasons at Covent Garden it was occasionally employed even before the fashionable subscribers, who may be presumed to have tolerated it, since they did not manifest any disapproval of its use. Since the first edition of this book was published, the Utopian idea, as it then seemed, of a national opera for London has advanced considerably towards realisation, and it is certain that when it is set on foot, the English language alone will be employed.

While opera is habitually performed in a foreign language, or, if in English, by those who have not the art of making their words intelligible, there will always be a demand for books that tell the story more clearly than is to be found in the doggerel translations of the libretti, unless audiences return with one accord to the attitude of the amateurs of former days, who paid not the slightest attention to the plot of the piece, provided only that their favourite singers were taking part. Very often in that classic period the performers themselves knew nothing and cared less about the dramatic meaning of the works in which they appeared, and a venerable anecdote is current concerning a certain supper party, the guests at which had all identified themselves with one or other of the principal parts in 'Il Trovatore'. A question being asked as to the plot of the then popular piece, it was found that not one of the company had the vaguest notion what it was all about. The old lady who, during the church scene in 'Faust', asked her granddaughter, in a spirit of humble inquiry, what the relationship was between the two persons on the stage, is no figment of a diseased imagination; the thing actually happened not long ago, and one is left to wonder what impression the preceding scenes had made upon the hearer.

Of books that profess to tell the stories of the most popular operas there is no lack, but, as a rule, the plots are related in a 'bald and unconvincing' style, that leaves much to be desired, and sometimes in a confused way that necessitates a visit to the opera itself in order to clear up the explanation. There are useful dictionaries, too, notably the excellent 'Opern-Handbuch' of Dr Riemann, which



gives the names and dates of production of every opera of any note; but the German scientist does not always condescend to the detailed narration of the stories, though he gives the sources from which they may have been derived. Mr Streatfeild has hit upon the happy idea of combining the mere story-telling part of his task with a survey of the history of opera from its beginning early in the seventeenth century to the present day. In the course of this historical narrative, the plots of all operas that made a great mark in the past, or that have any chance of being revived in the present, are related clearly and succinctly, and with a rare and delightful absence of prejudice. The author finds much to praise in every school; he is neither impatient of old opera nor intolerant of new developments which have yet to prove their value; and he makes us feel that he is not only an enthusiastic lover of opera as a whole, but a cultivated musician. The historical plan adopted, in contradistinction to the arrangement by which the operas are grouped under their titles in alphabetical order, involves perhaps a little extra trouble to the casual reader; but by the aid of the index, any opera concerning which the casual reader desires to be informed can be found in its proper place, and the chief facts regarding its origin and production are given there as well as the story of its action.

J.A. FULLER-MAITLAND

*June 1907*

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# CHAPTER I

## THE BEGINNINGS OF OPERA

PERI—MONTEVERDE—CAVALLI—CESTI—CAMBERT—LULLI—PURCELL—KEISER—SCARLATTI—HANDEL

The early history of many forms of art is wrapped in obscurity. Even in music, the youngest of the arts, the precise origin of many modern developments is largely a matter of conjecture. The history of opera, fortunately for the historian, is an exception to the rule. All the circumstances which combine to produce the idea of opera are known to us, and every detail of its genesis is established beyond the possibility of doubt.

The invention of opera partook largely of the nature of an accident. Late in the sixteenth century a few Florentine amateurs, fired with the enthusiasm for Greek art which was at that time the ruling passion of every cultivated spirit in Italy, set themselves the task of reconstructing the conditions of the Athenian drama. The result of their labours, regarded as an attempted revival of the lost glories of Greek tragedy, was a complete failure; but, unknown to themselves, they produced the germ of that art-form which, as years passed on, was destined, in their own country at least, to reign alone in the affections of the people, and to take the place, so far as the altered conditions permitted, of the national drama which they had fondly hoped to recreate.

The foundations of the new art-form rested upon the theory that the drama of the Greeks was throughout declaimed to a musical accompaniment. The reformers, therefore, dismissed spoken dialogue from their drama, and employed in its place a species of free declamation or recitative, which they called *musica parlante*. The first work in which the new style of composition was used was the 'Dafne' of Jacopo Peri, which was privately performed in 1597. No trace of this work survives, nor of the musical dramas by Emilio del Cavaliere and Vincenzo Galilei to which the closing years of the sixteenth century gave birth. But it is best to regard these privately performed works merely as experiments, and to date the actual foundation of opera from the year 1600, when a public performance of Peri's 'Euridice' was given at Florence in honour of the marriage of Maria de' Medici and Henry IV. of France. A few years later a printed edition of this work was published at Venice, a copy of which is now in the library of the British Museum, and in recent times it has been reprinted, so that those who are curious in these matters can study this protoplasmic opera at their leisure. Except for a few bars of insignificant chorus, the whole work consists of the accompanied recitative, which was the invention of these Florentine reformers. The voices are accompanied by a violin, *chitarone* (a large guitar), *lira grande*, *liuto grosso*, and *gravicembalo* or harpsichord, which filled in the harmonies indicated by the figured bass. The instrumental portions of the work are poor and thin, and the chief beauty lies in the vocal part, which is often really pathetic and expressive. Peri evidently tried to give musical form to the ordinary inflections of the human voice, how successfully may be seen in the Lament of Orpheus which Mr. Morton Latham has reprinted in his 'Renaissance of Music.' The original edition of 'Euridice' contains an interesting preface, in which the composer sets forth the theory upon which he worked, and the aims which he had in view. It is too long to be reprinted here, but should be read by all interested in the early history of opera.

With the production of 'Euridice' the history of opera may be said to begin; but if the new art-form had depended only upon the efforts of Peri and his friends, it must soon have languished and died. With all their enthusiasm, the little band of Florentines had too slight an acquaintance with the science of music to give proper effect to the ideas which they originated. Peri built the ship, but it was reserved for the genius of Claudio Monteverde to launch it upon a wider ocean than his predecessor could have dreamed of. Monteverde had been trained in the polyphonic school of Palestrina, but his genius had never acquiesced in the rules and restrictions in which the older masters delighted. He was a poor contrapuntist, and his madrigals are chiefly interesting as a proof of how ill the novel harmonies of which he was the discoverer accorded with the severe purity of the older school. But in the new art he found the field his genius required. What had been weakness and license in the madrigal became strength and beauty in the opera. The new wine was put into new bottles, and both were preserved. Monteverde produced his 'Arianna' in 1607, and his 'Orfeo' in 1608, and with these two works started opera upon the path of development which was to culminate in the works of Wagner. 'Arianna,' which, according to Marco da Gagliano, himself a rival composer of high ability, 'visibly moved all the theatre to tears,' is lost to us save for a few quotations; but 'Orfeo' is in existence, and has recently been reprinted in Germany. A glance at the score shows what a gulf separates this work from Peri's treatment of the same story. Monteverde, with his orchestra of thirty-nine instruments—brass, wood, and strings complete—his rich and brilliant harmonies, sounding so strangely beautiful to ears accustomed only to the severity of the polyphonic school, and his delicious and affecting melodies, sometimes rising almost to the dignity of an aria, must have seemed something more than human to the eager Venetians as they listened for the first time to music as rich in colour as the gleaming marbles of the Cà d'Oro or the radiant canvases of Titian and Giorgione.

The success of Monteverde had its natural result. He soon had pupils and imitators by the score. The Venetians speedily discovered that they had an inherent taste for opera, and the musicians of the day delighted to cater for it. Monteverde's most famous pupil was Cavalli, to whom may with some certainty be attributed an innovation which was destined to affect the future of opera very deeply. In his time, to quote Mr. Latham's 'Renaissance of Music,' 'the *musica parlante* of the earliest days of opera was broken up into recitative, which was less eloquent, and aria, which was more ornamental. The first appearance of this change is to be found in Cavalli's operas, in which certain rhythmical movements called "arias" which are quite distinct from the *musica parlante*, make their appearance. The music assigned by Monteverde to Orpheus when he is leading Eurydice back from the Shades is undoubtedly an air, but the situation is one to which an air is appropriate, and *musica parlante* would be inappropriate. If the drama had been a play to be spoken and not sung, there would not have been any incongruity in allotting a song to Orpheus, to enable Eurydice to trace him through the dark abodes of Hades. But the arias of Cavalli are not confined to such special situations, and recur frequently.' Cavalli had the true Venetian love of colour. In his hands the orchestra began to assume a new importance. His attempts to give musical expression to the sights and sounds of nature—the murmur of the sea, the rippling of the brook and the tempestuous fury of the winds—mark an interesting step in the history of orchestral development. With Marcantonio Cesti appears another innovation of scarcely less importance to the history of opera than the invention of the aria itself—the *da capo* or the repetition of the first part of the aria in its entirety after the conclusion of the second part. However much the *da capo* may have contributed to the settlement of form in composition, it must be admitted that it struck at the root of all real dramatic effect, and in process of time degraded opera to the level of a concert. Cesti was a pupil of Carissimi, who is famous chiefly for his sacred works, and from him he learnt to prefer mere musical beauty to dramatic truth. Those of his operas which remain to us show a far greater command of orchestral and vocal resource than Monteverde or Cavalli could boast, but so far as real expression and sincerity are

concerned, they are inferior to the less cultured efforts of the earlier musicians. It would be idle to attempt an enumeration of the Venetian composers of the seventeenth century and their works. Some idea of the musical activity which prevailed may be gathered from the fact that while the first public theatre was opened in 1637, before the close of the century there were no less than eleven theatres in the city devoted to the performance of opera alone.

Meanwhile the enthusiasm for the new art-form spread through the cities of Italy. According to an extant letter of Salvator Rosa's, opera was in full swing in Rome during the Carnival of 1652. The first opera of Provenza, the founder of the Neapolitan school, was produced in 1658. Bologna, Milan, Parma, and other cities soon followed suit. France, too, was not behindhand, but there the development of the art soon deserved the name a new school of opera, distinct in many important particulars from its parent in Italy. The French nobles who saw the performance of Peri's 'Euridice' at the marriage of Henry IV. may have carried back tales of its splendour and beauty to their own country, but Paris was not as yet ripe for opera. Not until 1647 did the French Court make the acquaintance of the new art which was afterwards to win some of its most brilliant triumphs in their city. In that year a performance of Peri's 'Euridice' (which, in spite of newer developments, had not lost its popularity) was given in Paris under the patronage of Cardinal Mazarin. This was followed by Cavalli's 'Serse,' conducted by the composer himself. These performances quickened the latent genius of the French people, and Robert Cambert, the founder of their school, hastened to produce operas, which, though bearing traces of Italian influence, were nevertheless distinctively French in manner and method. His works, two of which are known to us, 'Pomone' and 'Les Peines et les Plaisirs de l'Amour,' were to a certain extent a development of the masques which had been popular in Paris for many years. They are pastoral and allegorical in subject, and are often merely a vehicle for fulsome adulation of the 'Roi Soleil.' But in construction they are operas pure and simple. There is no spoken dialogue, and the music is continuous from first to last. Cambert's operas were very successful, and in conjunction with his librettist Perrin he received a charter from the King in 1669, giving him the sole right of establishing opera-houses in the kingdom. Quarrels, however, ensued. Cambert and Perrin separated. The charter was revoked, or rather granted to a new-comer, Giovanni Battista Lulli, and Cambert, in disgrace, retired to England, where he died. Lulli (1633-1687) left Italy too young to be much influenced by the developments of opera in that country, and was besides too good a man of business to allow his artistic instinct to interfere with his chance of success. He found Cambert's operas popular in Paris, and instead of attempting any radical reforms, he adhered to the form which he found ready made, only developing the orchestra to an extent which was then unknown, and adding dignity and passion to the airs and recitatives. Lulli's industry was extraordinary. During the space of fourteen years he wrote no fewer than twenty operas, conceived upon a grand scale, and produced with great magnificence. His treatment of recitative is perhaps his strongest point, for in spite of the beauty of one or two isolated songs, such as the famous 'Bois épaïs' in 'Amadis' and Charon's wonderful air in 'Alceste,' his melodic gift was not great, and his choral writing is generally of the most unpretentious description. But his recitative is always solid and dignified, and often impassioned and pathetic. Music, too, owes him a great debt for his invention of what is known as the French form of overture, consisting of a prelude, fugue, and dance movement, which was afterwards carried to the highest conceivable pitch of perfection by Handel.

Meanwhile an offshoot of the French school, transplanted to the banks of the Thames, had blossomed into a brief but brilliant life under the fostering care of the greatest musical genius our island has ever produced, Henry Purcell. Charles II. was not a profound musician, but he knew what sort of music he liked, and on one point his mind was made up—that he did not like the music of the elderly composers who had survived the Protectorate, and came forward at his restoration to claim the posts which they had held at his father's court. Christopher Gibbons, Child, and other relics of the dead polyphonic school were quietly dismissed to provincial organ-lofts, and Pelham Humphreys, the most promising of the 'Children of the Chapel Royal,' was sent over to Paris to learn all that was newest in music at the feet of Lulli. Humphreys came back, in the words of Pepys, 'an absolute Monsieur,' full of the latest theories concerning opera and music generally, and with a sublime contempt for the efforts of his stay-at-home colleagues. His own music shows the French influence very strongly, and in that of his pupil Henry Purcell (1658-1695) it may also be perceived, although coloured and transmuted by the intensely English character of Purcell's own genius. For many years it was supposed that Purcell's first and, strictly speaking, his only opera, 'Dido and Æneas,' was written by him at the age of seventeen and produced in 1675. Mr. Barclay Squire has now proved that it was not produced until much later, but this scarcely lessens the wonder of it, for Purcell can never have seen an opera performed, and his acquaintance with the new art-form must have been based upon Pelham Humphrey's account of the performances which he had seen in Paris. Possibly, too, he may have had opportunities of studying the engraved scores of some of Lulli's operas, which, considering the close intercourse between the courts of France and England, may have found their way across the Channel. 'Dido and Æneas' is now universally spoken of as the first English opera. Masques had been popular from the time of Queen Elizabeth onwards, which the greatest living poets and musicians had not disdained to produce, and Sir William Davenant had given performances of musical dramas 'after the manner of the Ancients' during the closing years of the Commonwealth, but it is probable that spoken dialogue occurred in all these entertainments, as it certainly did in Locke's 'Psyche,' Banister's 'Circe,' in fact, in all the dramatic works of this period which were wrongly described as operas. In 'Dido and Æneas,' on the contrary, the music is continuous throughout. Airs and recitatives, choruses and instrumental pieces succeed each other, as in the operas of the Italian and French schools. 'Dido and Æneas' was written for performance at a young ladies' school kept by one Josias Priest in Leicester Fields and afterwards at Chelsea. The libretto was the work of Nahum Tate, the Poet Laureate of the time. The opera is in three short acts, and Virgil's version of the story is followed pretty closely save for the intrusion of a sorceress and a chorus of witches who have sworn Dido's destruction and send a messenger to Æneas, disguised as Mercury, to hasten his departure. Dido's death song, which is followed by a chorus of mourning Cupids, is one of the most pathetic scenes ever written, and illustrates in a forcible manner Purcell's beautiful and ingenious use of a ground-bass. The gloomy chromatic passage constantly repeated by the bass instruments, with ever-varying harmonies in the violins, paints such a picture of the blank despair of a broken heart as Wagner himself, with his immense orchestral resources, never surpassed. In the general construction of his opera Purcell followed the French model, but his treatment of recitative is bolder and more various than that of Lulli, while as a melodist he is incomparably superior. Purcell never repeated the experiment of 'Dido and Æneas.' Musical taste in England was presumably not cultivated enough to appreciate a work of so advanced a style. At any rate, for the rest of his life, Purcell wrote nothing for the theatre but incidental music. Much of this, notably the scores of 'Timon of Athens,' 'Bonduca,' and 'King Arthur,' is wonderfully beautiful, but in all of these works the spoken dialogue forms the basis of the piece, and the music is merely an adjunct, often with little reference to the main interest of the play. In 'King Arthur' occurs the famous 'Frost Scene,' the close resemblance of which to the 'Chœur de Peuples des Climats Glacés' in Lulli's 'Isis' would alone make it certain that Purcell was a careful student of the French school of opera.

Opera did not take long to cross the Alps, and early in the seventeenth century the works of Italian composers found a warm welcome at the courts of southern Germany. But Germany was not as yet ripe for a national opera. During the first half of the



century there are records of one or two isolated attempts to found a school of German opera, but the iron heel of the Thirty Years' War was on the neck of the country, and art struggled in vain against overwhelming odds. The first German opera, strictly so called, was the 'Dafne' of Heinrich Schütz, the words of which were a translation of the libretto already used by Peri. Of this work, which was produced in 1627, all trace has been lost. 'Seelewig,' by Sigmund Staden, which is described as a 'Gesangsweis auf italienische Art gesetzt,' was printed at Nuremberg in 1644, but there is no record of its ever having been performed. To Hamburg belongs the honour of establishing German opera upon a permanent basis. There, in 1678, some years before the production of Purcell's 'Dido and Æneas,' an opera-house was opened with a performance of a Singspiel entitled 'Der erschaffene, gefallene und aufgerichtete Mensch,' the music of which was composed by Johann Theile. Three other works, all of them secular, were produced in the same year. The new form of entertainment speedily became popular among the rich burghers of the Free City, and composers were easily found to cater for their taste.

For many years Hamburg was the only German town where opera found a permanent home, but there the musical activity must have been remarkable. Reinhard Keiser (1673-1739), the composer whose name stands for what was best in the school, is said alone to have produced no fewer than a hundred and sixteen operas. Nearly all of these works have disappeared, and those that remain are for the most part disfigured by the barbarous mixture of Italian and German which was fashionable at Hamburg and in London too at that time. The singers were possibly for the most part Italians, who insisted upon singing their airs in their native language, though they had no objection to using German for the recitatives, in which there was no opportunity for vocal display. Keiser's music lacks the suavity of the Italian school, but his recitatives are vigorous and powerful, and seem to foreshadow the triumphs which the German school was afterwards to win in declamatory music. The earliest operas of Handel (1685-1759) were written for Hamburg, and in the one of them which Fate has preserved for us, 'Almira' (1704), we see the Hamburg school at its finest. In spite of the ludicrous mixture of German and Italian there is a good deal of dramatic power in the music, and the airs show how early Handel's wonderful gift of melody had developed. The chorus has very little to do, but a delightful feature of the work is to be found in the series of beautiful dance-tunes lavishly scattered throughout it. One of these, a Sarabande, was afterwards worked up into the famous air, 'Lascia ch' io pianga,' in 'Rinaldo.' When the new Hamburg Opera-House was opened in 1874, it was inaugurated by a performance of 'Almira,' which gave musicians a unique opportunity of realising to some extent what opera was like at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In 1706 Handel left Hamburg for the purpose of prosecuting his studies in Italy. There he found the world at the feet of Alessandro Scarlatti (1659-1725), a composer whose importance to the history of opera can scarcely be over-estimated. He is said, like Cesti, to have been a pupil of Carissimi, though, as the latter died in 1674, at the age of seventy, he cannot have done much more than lay the foundation of his pupil's greatness. The invention of the *da capo* is generally attributed to Scarlatti, wrongly, as has already been shown, since it appears in Cesti's opera 'La Dori,' which was performed in 1663. But it seems almost certain that Scarlatti was the first to use accompanied recitative, a powerful means of dramatic expression in the hands of all who followed him, while his genius advanced the science of instrumentation to a point hitherto unknown.

Nevertheless, Scarlatti's efforts were almost exclusively addressed to the development of the musical rather than the dramatic side of opera, and he is largely responsible for the strait-jacket of convention in which opera was confined during the greater part of the eighteenth century, in fact until it was released by the genius of Gluck.

Handel's conquest of Italy was speedy and decisive. 'Rodrigo,' produced at Florence in 1707, made him famous, and 'Agrippina' (Venice, 1708) raised him almost to the rank of a god. At every pause in the performance the theatre rang with shouts of 'Viva il caro Sassone,' and the opera had an unbroken run of twenty-seven nights, a thing till then unheard of. It did not take Handel long to learn all that Italy could teach him. With his inexhaustible fertility of melody and his complete command of every musical resource then known, he only needed to have his German vigour tempered by Italian suppleness and grace to stand forth as the foremost operatic composer of the age. His Italian training and his theatrical experience gave him a thorough knowledge of the capabilities of the human voice, and the practical common-sense which was always one of his most striking characteristics prevented him from ever treating it from the merely instrumental point of view, a pitfall into which many of the great composers have fallen. He left Italy for London in 1710, and produced his 'Rinaldo' at the Queen's Theatre in the Haymarket the following year. It was put upon the stage with unexampled magnificence, and its success was prodigious. 'Rinaldo' was quickly followed by such succession of masterpieces as put the ancient glories of the Italian stage to shame. Most of them were produced at the Haymarket Theatre, either under Handel's own management or under the auspices of a company known as the Royal Academy of Music. Handel's success made him many enemies, and he was throughout his career the object of innumerable plots on the part of disappointed and envious rivals. The most active of these was Buononcini, himself a composer of no mean ability, though eclipsed by the genius of Handel. Buononcini's machinations were so far successful—though he himself was compelled to leave England in disgrace for different reasons—that in 1741, after the production of his 'Deidamia,' Handel succumbed to bankruptcy and a severe attack of paralysis. After this he wrote no more for the stage, but devoted himself to the production of those oratorios which have made his name famous wherever the English language is spoken.

In spite of their transcendent beauties, the form of Handel's operas has long banished them from the stage. Handel, with all his genius, was not one of the great revolutionists of the history of music. He was content to bring existing forms to the highest possible point of perfection, without seeking to embark upon new oceans of discovery. Opera in his day consisted of a string of airs connected by recitative, with an occasional duet, and a chorus to bring down the curtain at the end of the work. The airs were, as a rule, fully accompanied. Strings, hautboys, and bassoons formed the groundwork of the orchestra. If distinctive colouring or sonority were required, the composer used flutes, horns, harps, and trumpets, while to gain an effect of a special nature, he would call in the assistance of lutes and mandolins, or archaic instruments such as the viola da gamba, violetta marina, cornetto and theorbo. The *recitativo secco* was accompanied by the harpsichord, at which the composer himself presided. The *recitativo stromentato*, or accompanied recitative, was only used to emphasise situations of special importance. Handel's incomparable genius infused so much dramatic power into this meagre form, that even now the truth and sincerity of his songs charm us no less than their extraordinary melodic beauty. But it is easy to see that in the hands of composers less richly endowed, this form was fated to degenerate into a mere concert upon the stage. The science of vocalisation was cultivated to such a pitch of perfection that composers were tempted, and even compelled, to consult the tastes of singers rather than dramatic truth. Handel's successors, such as Porpora and Hasse, without a tithe of his genius, used such talent as they possessed merely to exhibit the vocal dexterity of popular singers in the most agreeable light. The favourite form of entertainment in these degraded times was the *pasticcio*, a hybrid production composed of a selection of songs from various popular operas, often by three or four different composers, strung together regardless of rhyme or reason. Even in Handel's lifetime the older school of opera was tottering to its fall. Only the man was needed who should sweep the mass of insincerity from the stage and replace it by the purer ideal which had been the guiding spirit

of Peri and Monteverde.

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## CHAPTER II

### THE REFORMS OF GLUCK

The death of Lulli left French opera established upon a sure foundation. The form which he perfected seemed, with all its faults, to commend itself to the genius of the nation, and for many years a succession of his followers and imitators, such as Campra and Destouches, continued to produce works which differed little in scope and execution from the model he had established. The French drama of the seventeenth century had reached such a high point of development that its influence over the sister art was all-powerful. The composers of the French court willingly sacrificed musical to declamatory interest, and thus, while they steered clear of the mere tunefulness which was the rock on which Italian composers made shipwreck, they fell into the opposite extreme and wrote works which seem to us arid and jejune. Paris at this time was curiously isolated from the world of music, and it is strange to find how little the development of Italian opera affected the French school. Marais (1650-1718) was more alive to Southern influences than most of his contemporaries, and in his treatment of the aria there is a perceptible approach to Italian methods; but Rameau (1683-1764) brought back French opera once more to its distinctive national style. Though he followed the general lines of Lulli's school, he brought to bear upon it a richer sense of beauty and a completer musical organisation than Lulli ever possessed. In his treatment of declamation pure and simple, he was perhaps Lulli's inferior, but in all other respects he showed a decided advance upon his predecessor. He infused new life into the monotonous harmony and well-worn modulations which had done duty for so many years. His rhythms were novel and suggestive, and the originality and resource of his orchestration opened the eyes of Frenchmen to new worlds of beauty and expression. Not the least important part of Rameau's work lay in the influence which his music exerted upon the genius of the man to whom the regeneration of opera is mainly due. Christoph Willibald Gluck (1714-1787) was the son of a forester. Such musical education as he received he acquired in Italy, and his earlier works are written in the Italian style which was fashionable at the time. There are few indications in his youthful operas of the power which was destined later to work such changes in the world of opera. He was at first whole-hearted in his devotion to the school of Porpora, Hasse and the others who did so much to degrade Italian opera. 'Artaserse,' his first work, was produced in 1741, the year in which Handel bade farewell for ever to the stage. It was successful, and was promptly followed by others no less fortunate. In 1745 Gluck visited England where he produced 'La Caduta de' Giganti,' a work which excited the contempt of Handel. In the following year he produced 'Piramo e Tisbe,' a pasticcio, which failed completely. Its production, however, was by no means labour lost, if it be true, as the story goes, that it was by its means that Gluck's eyes were opened to the degradation to which opera had been reduced. It was about this time that Gluck first heard Rameau's music, and the power and simplicity of it compared with the empty sensuousness of Italian opera, must have materially strengthened him in the desire to do something to reform and purify his art. Yet, in spite of good resolutions, Gluck's progress was slow. In 1755 he settled at Vienna, and there, under the shadow of the court, he produced a series of works in which the attempt to realise dramatic truth is often distinctly perceptible, though the composer had as yet not mastered the means for its attainment. But in 1762 came 'Orfeo ed Euridice,' a work which placed Gluck at the head of all living operatic composers, and laid the foundation of the modern school of opera.

The libretto of 'Orfeo' was by Calzabigi, a prominent man of letters, but it seems probable that Gluck's own share in it was not a small one. The careful study which he had given to the proper conditions of opera was not likely to exclude so important a question as that of the construction and diction of the libretto, and the poem of 'Orfeo' shows so marked an inclination to break away from the conventionality and sham sentiment of the time that we can confidently attribute much of its originality to the influence of the composer himself. The opening scene shows the tomb of Eurydice erected in a grassy valley. Orpheus stands beside it plunged in the deepest grief, while a troop of shepherds and maidens bring flowers to adorn it. His despairing cry of 'Eurydice' breaks

passionately upon their mournful chorus, and the whole scene, though drawn in simple lines, is instinct with genuine pathos. When the rustic mourners have laid their gifts upon the tomb and departed, Orpheus calls upon the shade of his lost wife in an air of exquisite beauty, broken by expressive recitative. He declares his resolution of following her to the underworld, when Eros enters and tells him of the condition which the gods impose on him if he should attempt to rescue Eurydice from the shades. Left to himself, Orpheus discusses the question of the rescue in a recitative of great intrinsic power, which shows at a glance how far Gluck had already distanced his predecessors in variety and dramatic strength. The second act takes place in the underworld. The chorus of Furies is both picturesque and effective, and the barking of Cerberus which sounds through it is a touch, which though its *naïveté* may provoke a smile, is characteristic of Gluck's strenuous struggle for realism. Orpheus appears and pleads his cause in accents of touching entreaty. Time after time his pathetic song is broken by a sternly decisive 'No,' but in the end he triumphs, and the Furies grant him passage. The next scene is in the Elysian fields. After an introduction of charming grace, the spirits of the blessed are discovered disporting themselves after their kind. Orpheus appears, lost in wonder at the magical beauty of all around him. Here again is a remarkable instance of Gluck's pictorial power. Simple as are the means he employs, the effect is extraordinary. The murmuring of streams, the singing of birds, and the placid beauty of the landscape are depicted with a touch which, if light, is infallibly sure. Then follows the famous scene in which Orpheus, forbidden to look at the face of his beloved, tries to find her by touch and instinct among the crowd of happy spirits who pass him by. At last she approaches, and he clasps her in his arms, while a chorus of perfect beauty bids him farewell as he leads her in triumph to the world above. The third act shows the two wandering in a cavern on their way to the light of day. Eurydice is grieved that her husband should never look into her eyes, and her faith is growing cold. After a scene in which passionate beauty goes side by side with strange relapses into conventionality, Orpheus gives way to her prayers and reproaches, and turns to embrace her. In a moment she sinks back lifeless, and he pours forth his despair in the immortal strains of 'Che farò senza Euridice.' Eros then appears, and tells him that the gods have had pity upon his sorrow. He transports him to the Temple of Love, where Eurydice, restored to life, is awaiting him, and the opera ends with conventional rejoicings.

Beautiful as 'Orfeo' is—and the best proof of its enduring beauty is that, after nearly a hundred and fifty years of change and development, it has lost none of its power to charm—we must not be blind to the fact that it is a strange combination of strength and weakness. Strictly speaking, Gluck was by no means a first-rate musician, and in 1762 he had not mastered his new gospel of sincerity and truth so fully as to disguise the poverty of his technical equipment. Much of the orchestral part of the work is weak and thin. Berlioz even went so far as to describe the overture as *une niaiserie incroyable*, and the vocal part sometimes shows the influence of the empty formulas from which Gluck was trying to escape. Throughout the opera there are unmistakable traces of Rameau's influence, indeed it is plain that Gluck frankly took Rameau's 'Castor et Pollux' as his model when he sat down to compose 'Orfeo.' The plot of the earlier work, the rescue of Pollux by Castor from the infernal regions, has of course much in common with that of 'Orfeo' and it is obvious that Gluck took many hints from Rameau's musical treatment of the various scenes which the two works have in common.

In spite, however, of occasional weaknesses, 'Orfeo' is a work of consummate loveliness. Compared to the tortured complexity of our modern operas, it stands in its dignified simplicity like the Parthenon beside the bewildering beauty of a Gothic cathedral; and its truth and grandeur are perhaps the more conspicuous because allied to one of those classic stories which even in Gluck's time had become almost synonymous with emptiness and formality.

Five years elapsed between the production of 'Orfeo' and of Gluck's next great opera, 'Alceste'; but that these years were not wasted is proved by the great advance which is perceptible in the score of the later work. The libretto of 'Alceste' is in many ways superior to that of 'Orfeo,' and Gluck's share of the work shows an incontestable improvement upon anything he had yet done. His touch is firmer, and he rarely shows that inclination to drop back into the old conventional style,

which occasionally mars the beauty of 'Orfeo.' Gluck wrote a preface to the published score of 'Alceste,' which is one of the most interesting documents in the history of music. It proves conclusively—not that any proof is necessary—that the composer had thought long and seriously about the scope of his art, and that the reforms which he introduced were a deliberate attempt to reconstruct opera upon a new basis of ideal beauty. If he sometimes failed to act up to his own theories, it must be remembered in what school he had been trained, and how difficult must have been the attempt to cast off in a moment the style which had been habitual to him for so many years.

When 'Alceste' was produced in Paris in 1776, Gluck made some alterations in the score, some of which were scarcely improvements. In his later years he became so completely identified with the French school that the later version is now the more familiar.

The opera opens before the palace at Pheræ, where the people are gathered to pray Heaven to spare the life of Admetus, who lies at the point of death. Alcestis appears, and, after an air of great dignity and beauty, bids the people follow her to the temple, there to renew their supplications. The next scene shows the temple of Apollo. The high priest and the people make passionate appeal to the god for the life of their king, and the oracle replies that Admetus must perish, if no other will die in his place. The people, seized with terror, fly from the place, and Alcestis, left alone, determines to give up her own life for that of her husband. The high priest accepts her devotion, and in the famous air 'Divinités du Styx,' she offers herself a willing sacrifice to the gods below. In the original version the second act opened with a scene in a gloomy forest, in which Alcestis interviews the spirits of Death, and, after renewing her vow, obtains leave to return and bid farewell to her husband. The music of this scene is exceedingly impressive, and intrinsically it must have been one of the finest in the opera, but it does not advance the action in the least, and its omission sensibly increases the tragic effect of the drama. In the later version the act begins with the rejoicings of the people at the recovery of Admetus. Alcestis appears, and after vainly endeavouring to conceal her anguish from the eyes of Admetus is forced to admit that she is the victim whose death is to restore him to life. Admetus passionately refuses the sacrifice, and declares that he will rather die with her than allow her to immolate herself on his account. He rushes wildly into the palace, and Alcestis bids farewell to life in an air of extraordinary pathos and beauty. The third act opens with the lamentations of the people for their departed queen. Hercules, released for a moment from his labours, enters and asks for Admetus. He is horrified at the news of the calamity which has befallen his friend, and announces his resolve of rescuing Alcestis from the clutches of Death. Meanwhile Alcestis has reached the portals of the underworld, and is about to surrender herself to the powers of Hell. Admetus, who has not yet given up hope of persuading her to relinquish her purpose, appears, and pleads passionately with her to leave him to his doom. His prayers are vain, and Alcestis is tearing herself for the last time from his arms, when Hercules rushes in. After a short struggle he defeats the powers of Death and restores Alcestis to her husband. The character of Hercules did not appear in the earlier version of the opera, and in fact was not introduced until after Gluck had left Paris, a few days after the production of 'Alceste.' Most of the music allotted to him is probably not by Gluck at all, but seems to have been written by Gossec, who was at that time one of the rising musicians in Paris. The close of the opera is certainly inferior to the earlier parts, but the introduction of Hercules is a great improvement upon the original version of the last act, in which the rescue of Alcestis is effected by Apollo. The French librettist did not treat the episode cleverly, and indeed all the last scene is terribly prosaic, and lacking in poetical atmosphere. To see how the appearance of the lusty hero in the halls of woe can heighten the tragic interest by the sheer force of contrast, we must turn to the 'Alcestis' of Euripides, where the death of Alcestis and the strange conflict of Hercules with Death is treated with just that touch of mystery and unearthliness which is absent from the libretto which Gluck was called upon to set. Of the music of 'Alceste,' its passion and intensity, it is impossible to speak too highly. It has pages of miraculous power, in which the deepest tragedy and the most poignant pathos are depicted with unfaltering certainty. It is strange to think by what simple means Gluck scaled the loftiest heights. Compared with our modern orchestra the poverty of the resources upon which he depended seems almost ludicrous. Even in the vocal part of 'Alceste' he was so careful to

avoid anything like the sensuous beauty of the Italian style, that sometimes he fell into the opposite extreme and wrote merely arid rhetoric. Yet he held so consistently before him his ideal of dramatic truth, that his music has survived all changes of taste and fashion, and still delights connoisseurs as fully as on the day it was produced. 'Paride ed Elena,' Gluck's next great work, shows his genius under a more lyrical aspect. Here he gives freer reign to the romanticism which he had designedly checked in 'Alceste,' and much of the music seems in a measure to anticipate the new influences which Mozart was afterwards to infuse into German music. Unfortunately the libretto of 'Paride ed Elena,' though possessing great poetical merit, is monotonous and deficient in incident, so that the opera has never won the success which it deserves, and is now almost completely forgotten.

The admiration for the French school of opera which had been aroused in Gluck by hearing the works of Rameau was not by any means a passing fancy. His music proves that the French school had more influence upon his development than the Italian, so it was only natural that he should wish to have an opportunity of introducing his works to Paris. That opportunity came in 1774, when, after weary months of intrigue and disappointment, his 'Iphigène en Aulide' was produced at the Académie Royale de Musique. After that time Gluck wrote all his greatest works for the French stage, and became so completely identified with the country of his adoption, that nowadays we are far more apt to think of him as a French than as a German composer. 'Iphigénie en Aulide' is founded upon Racine's play, which in its turn had been derived from the tragedy of Euripides. The scene of the opera is laid at Aulis, where the Greek fleet is prevented by contrary winds from starting for Troy. Diana, who has been unwittingly insulted by Agamemnon, demands a human sacrifice, and Iphigenia, the guiltless daughter of Agamemnon, has been named by the high priest Calchas as the victim. Iphigenia and her mother Clytemnestra are on their way to join the fleet at Aulis, and Agamemnon has sent a despairing message to bid them return home, hoping thus to avoid the necessity of sacrificing his child. Meanwhile the Greek hosts, impatient of delay, clamour for the victim, and are only appeased by the assurance of Calchas that the sacrifice shall take place that very day. Left alone with Agamemnon, Calchas entreats him to submit to the will of the gods. Agamemnon, torn by conflicting emotions, at first refuses, but afterwards, relying upon the message which he has sent to his wife and daughter, promises that if Iphigenia sets foot in Aulis he will give her up to death. He has hardly spoken the words when shouts of joy announce the arrival of Clytemnestra and Iphigenia. The message has miscarried, and they are already in the camp. As a last resource Agamemnon now tells Clytemnestra that Achilles, the lover of her daughter, is false, hoping that this will drive her from the camp. Clytemnestra calls upon Iphigenia to thrust her betrayer from her bosom, and Iphigenia replies so heroically that it seems as though Agamemnon's plot to save his daughter's life might actually succeed. Unfortunately Achilles himself appears, and, after a scene of reproach and recrimination, succeeds in dispelling Iphigenia's doubts and winning her to complete reconciliation.

The second act begins with the rejoicings over the marriage of Iphigenia. The general joy is turned to lamentation by the discovery of Agamemnon's vow and the impending doom of Iphigenia. Clytemnestra passionately entreats Achilles to save her daughter, which he promises to do, though Iphigenia professes herself ready to obey her father. In the following scene Achilles meets Agamemnon, and, after a long altercation, swears to defend Iphigenia with the last drop of his blood. He rushes off, and Agamemnon is left in anguish to weigh his love for his daughter against his dread of the angry gods. Love triumphs and he sends Areas, his attendant, to bid Clytemnestra fly with Iphigenia home to Mycenae.

In the third act the Greeks are angrily demanding their victim. Achilles prays Iphigenia to fly with him, but she is constant to her idea of duty, and bids him a pathetic farewell. Achilles, however, is not to be persuaded, and in an access of noble rage swears to slay the priest upon the steps of the altar rather than submit to the sacrifice of his love. After another farewell scene with her mother Iphigenia is led off, while Clytemnestra, seeing in imagination her daughter under the knife of the priest, bursts forth into passionate blasphemy. Achilles and his Thessalian followers rush in to save Iphigenia, and for a time the contest rages fiercely, but eighteenth-century convention steps in. Calchas stops the combat, saying that the gods are at length appeased; Iphigenia is restored to



Achilles, and the opera ends with general rejoicings.

'Iphigénie en Aulide' gave Gluck a finer opportunity than he had yet had. The canvas is broader than in 'Alceste' or 'Orfeo,' and the emotions are more varied. The human interest, too, is more evenly sustained, and the supernatural element, which played so important a part in the two earlier works, is almost entirely absent. Nevertheless, fine as much of the music is, the restraint which Gluck exercised over himself is too plainly perceptible, and the result is that many of the scenes are stiff and frigid. There is scarcely a trace of the delightful lyricism which rushes through 'Paride ed Elena' like a flood of resistless delight. Gluck had set his ideal of perfect declamatory truth firmly before him, and he resisted every temptation to swerve into the paths of mere musical beauty. He had not yet learnt how to combine the two styles. He had not yet grasped the fact that in the noblest music truth and beauty are one and the same thing.

In 'Armide,' produced in 1777, he made another step forward. The libretto was the same as that used by Lulli nearly a hundred years before. The legend, already immortalised by Tasso, was strangely different from the classical stories which had hitherto inspired his greatest works. The opening scene strikes the note of romanticism which echoes through the whole opera. Armida, a princess deeply versed in magic arts, laments that one knight, and one only, in the army of the Crusaders has proved blind to her charms. All the rest are at her feet, but Rinaldo alone is obdurate. She has had a boding dream, moreover, in which Rinaldo has vanquished her, and all the consolations of her maidens cannot restore her peace of mind. Hidraot, her uncle, entreats her to choose a husband, but she declares that she will bestow her hand upon no one but the conqueror of Rinaldo. While the chorus is celebrating her charms, Arontes, a Paynim warrior, enters bleeding and wounded, and tells how the prowess of a single knight has robbed him of his captives. Armida at once recognises the hand of the recalcitrant Rinaldo, and the act ends with her vows of vengeance against the invincible hero.

The second act shows Rinaldo in quest of adventures which may win him the favour of Godfrey of Bouillon, whose wrath he has incurred. Armida's enchantments lead him to her magic gardens, where, amidst scenes of voluptuous beauty, he yields to the fascinations of the place, lays down his arms, and sinks into sleep. Armida rushes in, dagger in hand, but the sight of the sleeping hero is too potent for her, and overcome by passion, she bids the spirits of the air transport them to the bounds of the universe. In the third act we find that Rinaldo has rejected the love of the enchantress. Armida is inconsolable; she is ashamed of her weakness, and will not listen to the well-meaning consolations of her attendants. She calls upon the spirit of Hate, but when he appears she rejects his aid, and still clings desperately to her fatal passion. The fourth act, which is entirely superfluous, is devoted to the adventures in the enchanted garden of Ubaldo and a Danish knight, two Crusaders who have set forth with the intention of rescuing Rinaldo from the clutches of the sorceress. The fifth act takes place in Armida's palace. Rinaldo's proud spirit has at length been subdued, and he is completely the slave of the enchantress. The duet between the lovers is of the most bewitching loveliness, and much of it curiously anticipates the romantic element which was to burst forth in a future generation. Armida tears herself from Rinaldo's arms, and leaves him to be entertained by a ballet of spirits, while she transacts some business with the powers below. Ubaldo and the Danish knight now burst in, and soon bring Rinaldo to a proper frame of mind. He takes a polite farewell of Armida, who in vain attempts to prevent his going, and is walked off by his two Mentors. Left alone, Armida calls on her demons to destroy the palace, and the opera ends in wild confusion and tumult.

To say that 'Armide' recalls the romantic grace of 'Paride ed Elena,' is but half the truth. The lyrical grace of the earlier work is as it were concentrated and condensed in a series of pictures which for voluptuous beauty surpass anything that had been written before Gluck's day. Against the background formed by the magical splendour of the enchanted garden, the figure of Armida stands out in striking relief. The mingled pride and passion of the imperious princess are drawn with wonderful art. Even while her passion brings her to the feet of her conqueror, her haughty spirit rebels against her fate. Such weaknesses as the opera contains are principally attributable to the libretto, which is ill-constructed, and cold and formal in diction. Rinaldo is rather a colourless

person, and the other characters are for the most part merely lay-figures, though the grim figure of Hate is drawn with extraordinary power. But upon Armida the composer concentrated the full lens of his genius, and for her he wrote music which satisfies every requirement of dramatic truth, without losing touch of the lyrical beauty and persuasive passion which breathes life into soulless clay.

In 'Iphigénie en Tauride,' the last of his great works, which was produced in 1778, Gluck reached his highest point. Here he seems for the first time thoroughly to fuse and combine the two elements which are for ever at war in his earlier operas, musical beauty and dramatic truth. Throughout the score of 'Iphigénie en Tauride' the declamation is as vivid and true as in 'Alceste,' while the intrinsic loveliness of the music yields not a jot to the passion-charged strains of 'Armide.' The overture paints the gradual awakening of a tempest, and when the storm is at its height the curtain rises upon the temple of Diana at Tauris, where Iphigenia, snatched by the goddess from the knife of the executioner at Aulis, has been placed as high priestess. The priestesses in chorus beseech the gods to be propitious, and when the fury of the storm is allayed, Iphigenia recounts her dream of Agamemnon's death, and laments the woes of her house. She calls upon Diana to put an end to her life, which already has lasted too long. Thoas, the king of the country, now enters, alarmed by the outcries of the priestesses. He is a prey to superstitious fears, and willingly listens to the advice of his followers, that the gods can only be appeased by human blood. A message is now brought that two young strangers have been cast upon the rock-bound coast, and Thoas at once decides that they shall be the victims. Orestes and Pylades are now brought in. They refuse to make themselves known, and are bidden to prepare for death, while the act closes with the savage delight of the Scythians.

The second act is in the prison. Orestes bewails his destiny, and refuses the consolation which Pylades offers in a noble and famous song. Pylades is torn from his friend's arms by the officers of the guard, and Orestes, left to himself, after a paroxysm of madness sinks to sleep upon the prison floor. His eyes are closed, but his brain is a prey to frightful visions. The Furies surround him with horrible cries and menaces, singing a chorus of indescribable weirdness. Lastly, the shade of the murdered Clytemnestra passes before him, and he awakes with a shriek to find his cell empty save for the mournful form of Iphigenia, who has come to question the stranger as to his origin and the purpose of his visit to Tauris. In broken accents he tells her—what is new to her ears—the tale of the murder of Agamemnon, and the vengeance taken upon Clytemnestra by himself; adding, in order to conceal his own identity, that Orestes is also dead, and that Electra is the sole remnant of the house of Atreus. Iphigenia bursts into a passionate lament, and the act ends with her offering a solemn libation to the shade of her brother.

In the third act Iphigenia resolves to free one of the victims, and to send him with a message to Electra. A sentiment which she cannot explain bids her choose Orestes, but the latter refuses to save his life at the expense of that of his friend. A contention arises between the two, which is only decided by Orestes swearing to take his own life if Pylades is sacrificed. The precious scroll is thereupon entrusted to Pylades, who departs, vowing to return and save his friend.

In the fourth act Iphigenia is a prey to conflicting emotions. A mysterious sympathy forbids her to slay the prisoner, yet she tries to steel her heart for the performance of her terrible task, and calls upon Diana to aid her. Orestes is brought on by the priestesses, and while urging Iphigenia to deal the blow, blesses her for the pity which stays her hand. Just as the knife is about to descend, the dying words of Orestes, 'Was it thus thou didst perish in Aulis, Iphigenia my sister?' bring about the inevitable recognition, and the brother and sister rush into each other's arms. But Thoas has yet to be reckoned with. He is furious at the interruption of the sacrifice, and is about to execute summary vengeance upon both Iphigenia and Orestes, when Pylades returns with an army of Greek youths—whence he obtained them is not explained—and despatches the tyrant in the nick of time. The opera ends with the appearance of Pallas Athene, the patroness of Argos, who bids Orestes and his sister return to Greece, carrying with them the image of Diana, too long disgraced by the barbarous rites of the Scythians.

'Echo et Narcisse,' an opera cast in a somewhat lighter mould, which was produced in 1779, seems to have failed to please, and 'Iphigénie en Tauride' may be safely taken as the climax of Gluck's career. It is the happiest example of his peculiar power, and shows more convincingly than any of its predecessors where the secret of his greatness really lay. He was the first composer who treated an opera as an integral whole. He was inferior to many of his predecessors, notably to Handel, in musical science, and even in power of characterisation. But while their works were often hardly more than strings of detached scenes from which the airs might often be dissociated without much loss of effect, his operas were constructed upon a principle of dramatic unity which forbade one link to be taken from the chain without injuring the continuity of the whole. In purely technical matters, too, his reforms were far-reaching and important. He was first to make the overture in some sort a reflection of the drama which it preceded, and he used orchestral effects as a means of expressing the passion of his characters in a way that had not been dreamed of before. He dismissed the harpsichord from the orchestra, and strengthened his band with clarinets, an instrument unknown to Handel. His banishment of *recitativo secco*, and his restoration of the chorus to its proper place in the drama, were innovations of vast importance to the history of opera, but the chief strength of the influence which he exerted upon subsequent music lay in his power of suffusing each of his operas in an atmosphere special to itself.

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## CHAPTER III

### OPERA BUFFA, OPÉRA COMIQUE, AND SINGSPIEL

#### PERGOLESI—ROUSSEAU—MONSIGNY—GRÉTRY—CIMAROSA—HILLER

While Gluck was altering the course of musical history in Vienna, another revolution, less grand in scope and more gradually accomplished, but scarcely less important in its results, was being effected in Italy. This was the development of opera buffa, a form of art which was destined, in Italy at any rate, to become a serious rival to the older institution of opera seria, and, in the hands of Mozart, to produce masterpieces such as the world had certainly not known before his day, nor is ever likely to see surpassed. There is some uncertainty about the actual origin of opera buffa. A musical comedy by Vergilio Mazzocchi and Mario Marazzoli, entitled '*Chi sofie speri*,' was produced in Florence under the patronage of Cardinal Barberini as early as 1639. The poet Milton was present at this performance, and refers to it in one of his *Epistolae Familiares*. In 1657 a theatre was actually built in Florence for the performance of musical comedies. For some reason, however, it did not prove a success, and after a few years was compelled to close its doors. After these first experiments there seems to have been no attempt made to resuscitate opera buffa until the rise of the Neapolitan school in the following century. The genesis of the southern branch of opera buffa may with certainty be traced to the intermezzi, or musical interludes, which were introduced into the course of operas and dramas, probably with the object of relieving the mental strain induced by the effort of following a long serious performance. The popularity of these intermezzi throws a curious light upon the character of Italian audiences at that time. We should think it strange if an audience nowadays refused to sit through '*Hamlet*' unless it were diversified by occasional scenes from '*Box and Cox*.' As time went on, the proportions and general character of these intermezzi acquired greater importance, but it was not until the eighteenth century was well advanced that one of them was promoted to the rank of an independent opera, and, instead of being performed in scraps between the acts of a tragedy, was given for the first time as a separate work. This honour was accorded to Pergolesi's '*La Serva Padrona*,' in 1734, and the great success which it met with everywhere soon caused numberless imitations to spring up, so that in a few years opera buffa in Italy was launched upon a career of triumph.

Founded as it was in avowed imitation of the tragedy of the Greeks, opera had never deigned to touch modern life at any point. For a long time the subjects of Italian operas were taken solely from classical legend, and though in time librettists were compelled to have recourse to the medieval romances, they never ventured out of an antiquity more or less remote. Thus it is easy to conceive the delight of the music-loving people of Naples when they found that the opera which they adored could be enjoyed in combination with a mirthful and even farcical story, interpreted by characters who might have stepped out of one of their own market-places. But, apart from the freedom and variety of the subjects with which it dealt, the development of opera buffa gave rise to an art-form which is of the utmost importance to the history of opera—the concerted finale. Nicolo Logroscino (1700-1763) seems to have been the first composer who conceived the idea of working up the end of an act to a musical climax by bringing all his characters together and blending their voices into a musical texture of some elaboration. Logroscino wrote only in the Neapolitan dialect, and his works had little success beyond the limits of his own province; but his invention was quickly adopted by all writers of opera buffa, and soon became an important factor in the development of the art. Later composers elaborated his idea by extending the finale to more than one movement, and by varying the key-colour. Finally, but not until after many years, it was introduced into opera seria, when it gave birth to the idea of elaborate trios and quartets, which were afterwards to play so important a part in its development. Logroscino's reputation was chiefly local, but the works of Pergolesi (1710-1736) and Jomelli (1714-1774) made the Neapolitan school famous throughout Europe. Both these composers are now best known by their sacred works, but during their lives their operas attained an extraordinary degree of popularity. Both succeeded equally in comedy and tragedy, but

Jomelli's operas are now forgotten, while Pergolesi is known only by his delightful intermezzo 'La Serva Padrona.' This diverting little piece tells of the schemes of the chambermaid, Serpina, to win the hand of her master, Pandolfo. She is helped by Scapin, the valet, who, disguised as a captain, makes violent love to her, and piques the old gentleman into proposing, almost against his will. 'La Serva Padrona' made the tour of Europe, and was received everywhere with tumultuous applause. In Paris it was performed in 1750, and may be said at once to have founded the school of French opéra comique. Rousseau extolled its beauty as a protest against the arid declamation of the school of Lulli, and it was the subject of one of the bitterest dissensions ever known in the history of music. But the 'Guerre des Bouffons,' as the struggle was called, proved one thing, which had already been satisfactorily decided in Italy, namely, that there was plenty of room in the world for serious and comic opera at the same time.

There had been a kind of opéra comique in France for many years, a species of musical pantomime which was very popular at the fairs of St. Laurent and St. Gervais. This form of entertainment scarcely came within the province of art, but it served as a starting-point for the history of opéra comique, which was afterwards so brilliant. The success of the Italian company which performed the comic operas of Pergolesi, Jomelli, and others, fired the French composers to emulation, and in 1753 the first French opéra comique, in the strict sense of the word, 'Le Devin du Village,' by the great Rousseau, was performed at the Académie de Musique. Musically the work is feeble and characterless, but the contrast which it offered to the stiff and serious works of the tragic composers made it popular. Whatever its faults may be, it is simple and natural, and its tender little melodies fell pleasantly upon ears too well accustomed to the pomposities of Rameau and his school. At first lovers of opéra comique in Paris had to subsist chiefly upon translations from the Italian; but in 1755 'Ninette à la Cour,' a dainty little work written by a Neapolitan composer, Duni, to a French libretto, gained a great success. Soon afterwards, Monsigny, a composer who may well be called the father of opéra comique, produced his first work, and started upon a career of success which extended into the next century.

The early days of opéra comique in Paris were distracted by the jealousy existing between the French and Italian schools, but in 1762 peace was made between the rival factions, and by process of fusion the two became one. With the opening of the new Théâtre de l'Opéra Comique—the Salle Favart, as it was then called—there began a new and brilliant period for the history of French art. It is a significant fact, and one which goes far to prove how closely the foundation of opéra comique was connected with a revolt against the boredom of grand opera, that the most successful composers in the new *genre* were those who were actually innocent of any musical training whatsoever. Monsigny (1729-1817) is a particularly striking instance of natural genius triumphing in spite of a defective education. Nothing can exceed the thinness and poverty of his scores, or their lack of all real musical interest; yet, by the sureness of his natural instinct for the stage, he succeeded in writing music which still moves us as much by its brilliant gaiety as by its tender pathos. 'Le Déserteur,' his most famous work, is a touching little story of a soldier who deserts in a fit of jealousy, and is condemned to be shot, but is saved by his sweetheart, who begs his pardon from the king. Much of the music is almost childish in its *naïveté*, but there is real pathos in the famous air 'Adieu, Louise,' and some of the lighter scenes in the opera are touched off very happily.

The musical education of Grétry (1741-1831) was perhaps more elaborate than that of Monsigny, but it fell very far short of profundity. His music excels in grace and humour, and he rarely treated serious subjects with success. Such works as 'Le Tableau Parlant,' 'Les Deux Avides,' and 'L'Amant Jaloux' are models of lightness and brilliancy, whatever may be thought of their musicianship. 'Richard Coeur de Lion' is the one instance of Grétry having successfully attempted a loftier theme, and it remains his masterpiece. The scene is laid at the castle of Dürrenstein in Austria, where Richard lies imprisoned, and deals with the efforts of his faithful minstrel Blondel to rescue him. In this work Grétry adapted his style to his subject with wonderful versatility. Much of the music is noble and dignified in style, and Blondel's air in particular, 'O Richard, O mon roi,' has a masculine vigour which is rarely found in the composer's work. But as a

rule Grétry is happiest in his delicate little pastorals and fantastic comedies, and, for all their slightness, his works bear the test of revival better than those of many of his more learned contemporaries. Philidor (1726-1797) was almost more famous as a chess-player than as a composer. He had the advantage of a sound musical education under Campra, one of the predecessors of Rameau, and his music has far more solid qualities than that of Grétry or Monsigny. His treatment of the orchestra, too, was more scientific than that of his contemporaries, but he had little gift of melody, and he was deficient in dramatic instinct. He often visited England, and ended by dying in London. One of the best of his works, 'Tom Jones,' was written upon an English subject. Philidor was popular in his day, but his works have rarely been heard by the present generation.

With Grétry the first period of opéra comique may be said to close; indeed, the taste of French audiences had begun to change some years before the close of the eighteenth century. The mighty wave of the Revolution swept away the idle gallantries of the sham pastoral, while Ossian newly discovered and Shakespeare newly translated opened the eyes of cultivated Frenchmen to the possibilities of poetry and romance. At the same time, the works of Haydn and Mozart, which had already crossed the frontier, disturbed preconceived notions about the limits of orchestral colouring, and made the thin little scores of Grétry and his contemporaries seem doubly jejune. The change in public taste was gradual, but none the less certain. The opening years of the nineteenth century saw a singular evolution, if not revolution, in the history of opéra comique.

Meanwhile opera in Italy was pursuing its triumphant course. The introduction of the finale brought the two great divisions of opera into closer connection, and most of the great composers of this period succeeded as well in opera buffa as in opera seria. The impetus given to the progress of the art by the brilliant Neapolitan school was ably sustained by such composers as Niccolò Piccinni (1728-1800), a composer who is now known principally to fame as the unsuccessful rival brought forward by the Italian party in Paris in the year 1776 in the vain hope of crushing Gluck. Piccinni sinks into insignificance by the side of Gluck, but he was nevertheless an able composer, and certainly the leading representative of the Italian school at the time. He did much to develop the concerted finale, which before his day had been used with caution, not to say timidity, and was so constant in his devotion to the loftiest ideal of art that he died in poverty and starvation. Cimarosa (1749-1801) is the brightest name of the next generation. He shone particularly in comedy. His 'Gli Orazi e i Curiazi,' which moved his contemporaries to tears, is now forgotten, but 'Il Matrimonio Segreto' still delights us with its racy humour and delicate melody. The story is simplicity itself, but the situations are amusing in themselves, and are led up to with no little adroitness. Paolino, a young lawyer, has secretly married Carolina, the daughter of Geronimo, a rich and avaricious merchant. In order to smooth away the difficulties which must arise when the inevitable discovery of the marriage takes place, he tries to secure a rich friend of his own, Count Robinson, for Geronimo's other daughter, Elisetta. Unfortunately Robinson prefers Carolina, and proposes himself as son-in-law to Geronimo, who is of course delighted that his daughter should have secured so unexceptionable a *parti*, while the horrified Paolino discovers to his great dissatisfaction that the elderly Fidalma, Geronimo's sister, has cast languishing eyes upon himself. There is nothing for the young couple but flight, but unfortunately as they are making their escape they are discovered, and their secret is soon extorted. Geronimo's wrath is tremendous, but in the end matters are satisfactorily arranged, and the amiable Robinson after all expresses himself content with the charms of Elisetta. 'Il Matrimonio Segreto' was produced at Vienna in 1792, and proved so very much to the taste of the Emperor Leopold, who was present at the performance, that he gave all the singers and musicians a magnificent supper, and then insisted upon their performing the opera again from beginning to end. Cimarosa was a prolific writer, the number of his operas reaching the formidable total of seventy-six; but, save for 'Il Matrimonio Segreto,' they have all been consigned to oblivion. Although he was born only seven years before Mozart, and actually survived him for ten years, he belongs entirely to the earlier school of opera buffa. His talent is thoroughly Italian, untouched by German influence, and he excels in portraying the gay superficiality of the Italian character without attempting to dive far below the surface.

Even more prolific than Cimarosa was Paisiello (1741-1815), a composer whose works, though immensely popular in their day, did not possess individuality enough to defy the ravages of time. Paisiello deserves to be remembered as the first man to write an opera on the tale of 'Il Barbiere di Siviglia.' This work, though coldly received when it was first performed, ended by establishing so firm a hold upon the affections of the Italian public, that when Rossini tried to produce his opera on the same subject, the Romans refused to give it a hearing.

Paer (1771-1839) belongs chronologically to the next generation, but musically he has more in common with Paisiello than with Rossini. His principal claim to immortality rests upon the fact that a performance of his opera 'Eleonora' inspired Beethoven with the idea of writing 'Fidelio'; but although his serious efforts are comparatively worthless, many of his comic operas are exceedingly bright and attractive. 'Le Maître de Chapelle,' which was written to a French libretto, is still performed with tolerable frequency in Paris.

It is hardly likely that the whirligig of time will ever bring Paisiello and his contemporaries into popularity again in England, but in Italy there has been of late years a remarkable revival of interest in the works of the eighteenth century. Some years ago the Argentina Theatre in Rome devoted its winter season almost entirely to reproductions of the works of this school. Many of these old-world little operas, whose very names had been forgotten, were received most cordially, some of them—Paisiello's 'Scuffiara raggiratrice,' for instance—with genuine enthusiasm.

Wars and rumours of wars stunted musical development of all kinds in Germany during the earlier years of the eighteenth century. After the death of Keiser in 1739, the glory departed from Hamburg, and opera seems to have lain under a cloud until the advent of Johann Adam Hiller (1728-1804), the inventor of the Singspiel. Miller's Singspiele were vaudevilles of a simple and humorous description interspersed with music, occasionally concerted numbers of a very simple description, but more often songs derived directly from the traditions of the German Lied. These operettas were very popular, as the frequent editions of them which were called for, prove. Yet, in spite of their success, it was felt by many of the composers who imitated him that the combination of dialogue and music was inartistic, and Johann Friedrich Reichardt (1752-1814) attempted to solve the difficulty by relegating the music to a merely incidental position and conducting all the action of the piece by means of the dialogue. Nevertheless the older form of the Singspiel retained its popularity, and, although founded upon incorrect æsthetic principles—for no art, however ingenious, can fuse the convention of speech and the convention of song into an harmonious whole—was the means in later times of giving to the world, in 'Die Zauberflöte' and 'Fidelio,' nobler music than had yet been consecrated to the service of the stage.

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## CHAPTER IV

### MOZART

Although Mozart's (1756-1791) earliest years were passed at Salzburg, the musical influences which surrounded his cradle were mainly Italian. Salzburg imitated Vienna, and Vienna, in spite of Gluck, was still Italian in its sympathies, so far at any rate as opera seria was concerned. Mozart wrote his first opera, 'La Finta Semplice,' for Vienna, when he was twelve years old. It would have been performed in 1768 but for the intrigues of jealous rivals and the knavery of an impresario. It was not actually produced until the following year, when the Archbishop of Salzburg arranged a performance of it in his own city to console his little *protégé* for his disappointment at Vienna. It is of course an extraordinary work when the composer's age is taken into account, but intrinsically differs little from the thousand and one comic operas of the period, Mozart's first German opera, 'Bastien und Bastienne,' though written after 'La Finta Semplice,' was performed before it. It was given in 1768 in a private theatre belonging to Dr. Anton Meszmer, a rich Viennese bourgeois. It follows the lines of Miller's Singspiele closely, but shows more originality, especially in the orchestration, than 'La Finta Semplice.' The plot of the little work is an imitation of Rousseau's 'Devin du Village,' telling of the quarrels of a rustic couple, and their reconciliation through the good offices of a travelling conjurer. It was significant that the Italian and German schools should be respectively represented in the two infant works of the man who was afterwards to fuse the special beauties of each in works of immortal loveliness. Mozart's next four operas were, for the most part, hastily written—'Mitridate, Re di Ponto' (1770) and 'Lucio Silla' (1775) for Milan, 'La Finta Giardiniera' (1775) for Munich, and 'Il Re Pastore' (1775) for Salzburg. They adhere pretty closely to the conventional forms of the day, and, in spite of the beauty of many of the airs, can scarcely be said to contain much evidence of Mozart's incomparable genius. In 1778 the young composer visited Paris, where he stayed for several months. This period may be looked upon as the turning-point in his operatic career. In Paris he heard the operas of Gluck and Grétry, besides those of the Italian composers, such as Piccinni and Sacchini, whose best works were written for the French stage. He studied their scores carefully, and from them he learnt the principles of orchestration, which he was afterwards to turn to such account in 'Don Giovanni' and 'Die Zauberflöte.' The result of his studies was plainly visible in the first work which he produced after his return to Germany, 'Idomeneo.' This was written for the Court Theatre at Munich, and was performed for the first time on the 29th of January, 1781. The libretto, by the Abbé Giambattista Varesco, was modelled upon an earlier French work which had already been set to music by Campra. Idomeneo, King of Crete, on his way home from the siege of Troy, is overtaken by a terrific storm. In despair of his life, he vows that, should he reach the shore alive, he will sacrifice the first human being he meets to Neptune. This proves to be his son Idamante, who has been reigning in his stead during his absence. When he finds out who the victim is—for at first he does not recognise him—he tries to evade his vow by sending Idamante away to foreign lands. Electra the daughter of Agamemnon, driven from her country after the murder of her mother, has taken refuge in Crete, and Idomeneo bids his son return with her to Argos, and ascend the throne of the Atreidæ. Idamante loves Ilia, the daughter of Priam, who has been sent to Crete some time before as a prisoner from Troy, and is loved by her in return. Nevertheless he bows to his father's will, and is preparing to embark with Electra, when a storm arises, and a frightful sea monster issues from the waves and proceeds to devastate the land. The terror-stricken people demand that the victim shall be produced, and Idomeneo is compelled to confess that he has doomed his son to destruction. All are overcome with horror, but the priests begin to prepare for the sacrifice. Suddenly cries of joy are heard, and Idamante, who has slain the monster single-handed, is brought in by the priests and people. He is ready to die, and his father is preparing to strike the fatal blow, when Ilia rushes in and entreats to be allowed to die in his place. The lovers are still pleading anxiously with each other when a subterranean noise is heard, the statue of Neptune rocks, and a solemn voice pronounces the will of the gods in majestic accents. Idomeneo is to renounce the throne, and Idamante is to marry Ilia

and reign in his stead. Every one except Electra is vastly relieved, and the opera ends with dances and rejoicings.

The music of 'Idomeneo' is cast for the most part in Italian form, though the influence of Gluck is obvious in many points, particularly in the scene of the oracle. Here we find Mozart in his maturity for the first time; he has become a man, and put away childish things. In two points 'Idomeneo' is superior to any opera that had previously been written—in the concerted music (the choruses as well as the trios and quartets), and in the instrumentation. The chorus is promoted from the part which it usually plays in Gluck, that of a passive spectator. It joins in the drama, and takes an active part in the development of the plot, and the music which it is called upon to sing is often finer and more truly dramatic than that allotted to the solo singers. But the chorus had already been used effectively by Gluck and other composers; it is in his solo concerted music that Mozart forges ahead of all possible rivals. The power which he shows of contrasting the conflicting emotions of his characters in elaborate concerted movements was something really new to the stage. The one quartet in Handel's 'Radamisto' and the one trio in his 'Alcina,' magnificent as they are, are too exceptional in their occurrence to be quoted as instances, while the attempts of Rameau and his followers to impose dramatic significance into their concerted music, though technically interesting, do but faintly foreshadow the glory of Mozart. The orchestration of 'Idomeneo,' too, is something of the nature of a revelation. At Munich, Mozart had at his disposal an excellent and well-trained band, and this may go far to explain the elaborate care which he bestowed upon the instrumental side of his opera. The colouring of the score is sublime in conception and brilliant in detail. Even now it well repays the closest and most intimate study. 'Idomeneo' is practically the foundation of all modern orchestration.

Mozart's next work was very different both in scope and execution. It has already been pointed out that the two first works which the composer, as a child, wrote for the stage, followed respectively the Italian and German models. Similarly, he signalled his arrival at the full maturity of his powers by producing an Italian and German masterpiece side by side. 'Die Entführung aus dem Serail' was written for the Court Theatre at Vienna, in response to a special command of the Emperor Joseph II. It was produced on July 13, 1782. The original libretto was the work of C.F. Bretzner, but Mozart introduced so many alterations and improvements into the fabric of the story that, as it stands, much of it is practically his own work.

The Pasha Selim has carried off a Christian damsel named Constanze, whom he keeps in close confinement in his seraglio, in the hope that she may consent to be his wife. Belmont, Constanze's lover, has traced her to the Pasha's country house with the assistance of Pedrillo, a former servant of his own, now the Pasha's slave and chief gardener. Belmont's attempts to enter the house are frustrated by Osmin, the surly major-domo. At last, however, through the good offices of Pedrillo, he contrives to gain admission in the character of an architect. Osmin has a special motive for disliking Pedrillo, who has forestalled him in the affections of Blondchen, Constanze's maid; nevertheless he is beguiled by the wily servant into a drinking bout, and quieted with a harmless narcotic. This gives the lovers an opportunity for an interview, in which the details of their flight are arranged. The next night they make their escape. Belmont gets off safely with Constanze, but Pedrillo and Blondchen are seen by Osmin before they are clear of the house. The hue and cry is raised, and both couples are caught and brought back. They are all condemned to death, but the soft-hearted Pasha is so much overcome by their fidelity and self-sacrifice that he pardons them and sends them away in happiness.

Much of 'Die Entführung' is so thoroughly and characteristically German, that at first sight it may be thought surprising that it should have succeeded so well in a city like Vienna, which was inclined to look upon the Singspiel as a barbarian product of Northern Germany. But there is a reason for this, and it is one which goes to the root of the whole question of comic opera. Mozart saw that Italian comic operas often succeeded in spite of miserable libretti, because the entire interest was concentrated upon the music, and all the rest was forgotten. The German Singspiel writers made the mistake of letting their music be, for the most part, purely incidental, and conducting all the dramatic part of their plots by dialogue. Mozart borrowed the underlying idea of

the opera buffa, applied it to the form of the Singspiel, which he kept intact, and produced a work which succeeded in revolutionising the history of German opera. But, apart from the question of form, the music of 'Die Entführung' is in itself fine enough to be the foundation even of so imposing a structure as modern German music. The orchestral forces at Mozart's disposal were on a smaller scale than at Munich; but though less elaborate than that of 'Idomeneo,' the score of 'Die Entführung' is full of the tenderest and purest imagination. But the real importance of the work lies in the vivid power of characterisation, which Mozart here reveals for the first time in full maturity. It is by the extraordinary development of this quality that he transcends all other writers for the stage before or since. It is no exaggeration to say that Mozart's music reveals the inmost soul of the characters of his opera as plainly as if they were discussed upon a printed page. In his later works the opportunities given him of proving this magical power were more frequent and better. The libretto of 'Die Entführung' is a poor affair at best, but, considering the materials with which he had to work, Mozart never accomplished truer or more delicate work than in the music of Belmont and Constanze, of Pedrillo, and greatest of all, of Osmin.

In 1786 Mozart wrote the music to a foolish little one-act comedy entitled 'Der Schauspieldirektor,' describing the struggles of two rival singers for an engagement. A sparkling overture and a genuinely comic trio are the best numbers of the score; but the libretto gave Mozart little opportunity of exercising his peculiar talents. Since his original production various attempts have been made to fit 'Der Schauspieldirektor' with new and more effective libretti, but in no case has its performance attained any real success.

For the sake of completeness it may be well to mention the existence of a comic opera entitled 'L'Oie du Caire,' which is an exceedingly clever combination of the fragments left by Mozart of two unfinished operas, 'L'Oca del Cairo' and 'Lo Sposo Deluso,' fitted to a new and original libretto by the late M. Victor Wilder. In its modern form, this little opera, in which a lover is introduced into his mistress's garden inside an enormous goose, has been successfully performed both in France and England.

Not even the success of 'Die Entführung' could permanently establish German opera in Vienna. The musical sympathies of the aristocracy were entirely Italian, and Mozart had to bow to expediency. His next work, 'Le Nozze de Figaro' (1786), was written to an adaptation of Beaumarchais's famous comedy 'Le Mariage de Figaro,' which had been produced in Paris a few years before. Da Ponte, the librettist, wisely omitted all the political references, which contributed so much to the popularity of the original play, and left only a bustling comedy of intrigue, not perhaps very moral in tendency, but full of amusing incident and unflagging in spirit. It speaks volumes for the ingenuity of the librettist that though the imbroglio is often exceedingly complicated, no one feels the least difficulty in following every detail of it on the stage, though it is by no means easy to give a clear and comprehensive account of all the ramifications of the plot.

The scene is laid at the country-house of Count Almaviva. Figaro, the Count's valet, and Susanna, the Countess's maid, are to be married that day; but Figaro, who is well aware that the Count has a penchant for his *fiancée*, is on his guard against machinations in that quarter. Enter the page Cherubino, an ardent youth who is devotedly attached to his mistress. He has been caught by the Count flirting with Barberina, the gardener's daughter, and promptly dismissed from his service, and now he comes to Susanna to entreat her to intercede for him with the Countess. While the two are talking they hear the Count approaching, and Susanna hastily hides Cherubino behind a large arm-chair. The Count comes to offer Susanna a dowry if she will consent to meet him that evening, but she will have nothing to say to him. Basilio, the music-master, now enters, and the Count has only just time to slip behind Cherubino's arm-chair, while the page creeps round to the front of it, and is covered by Susanna with a cloak. Basilio, while repeating the Count's proposals, refers to Cherubino's passion for the Countess. This arouses the Count, who comes forward in a fury, orders the immediate dismissal of the page, and by the merest accident discovers the unlucky youth ensconced in the arm-chair. As Cherubino has heard every word of the interview, the first thing to do is to get him out of the way. The Count therefore presents him with a commission in his own regiment, and bids him pack off to Seville post-haste. Figaro now

appears with all the villagers in holiday attire to ask the Count to honour his marriage by giving the bride away. The Count cannot refuse, but postpones the ceremony for a few hours in the hope of gaining time to prosecute his suit. Meanwhile the Countess, Susanna, and Figaro are maturing a plot of their own to discomfit the Count and bring him back to the feet of his wife. Figaro writes an anonymous letter to the Count, telling him that the Countess has made an assignation with a stranger for that evening in the garden, hoping by this means to arouse his jealousy and divert his mind from the wedding. He assures him also of Susanna's intention to keep her appointment in the garden, intending that Cherubino, who has been allowed to put off his departure, shall be dressed up as a girl and take Susanna's place at the interview. The page comes to the Countess's room to be dressed, when suddenly the conspirators hear the Count approaching. Cherubino is hastily locked in an inner room, while Susanna slips into an alcove. While the Count is plying his wife with angry questions, Cherubino clumsily knocks over a chair. The Count hears the noise, and quickly jumps to the conclusion that the page is hiding in the inner room. The Countess denies everything and refuses to give up the key, whereupon the Count drags her off with him to get an axe to break in the door. Meanwhile Susanna liberates Cherubino, and takes his place in the inner room, while the latter escapes by jumping down into the garden. When the Count finally opens the door and discovers only Susanna within, his rage is turned to mortification, and he is forced to sue for pardon. The Countess is triumphant, but a change is given to the position of affairs by the appearance of Antonio, the gardener, who comes to complain that his flowers have been destroyed by someone jumping on them from the window. The Count's jealous fears are returning, but Figaro allays them by declaring that he is the culprit, and that he made his escape by the window in order to avoid the Count's anger. Antonio then produces a paper which he found dropped among the flowers. This proves to be Cherubino's commission. Once more the secret is nearly out, but Figaro saves the situation by declaring that the page gave it to him to get the seal affixed. The Countess and Susanna are beginning to congratulate themselves on their escape, when another diversion is created by the entrance of Marcellina, the Countess's old duenna, and Bartolo, her ex-guardian. Marcellina has received a promise in writing from Figaro that he will marry her if he fails to pay a sum of money which he owes her by a certain date, and she comes to claim her bridegroom. The Count is delighted at this new development, and promises Marcellina that she shall get her rights.

The second act (according to the original arrangement) is mainly devoted to clearing up the various difficulties. Figaro turns out to be the long-lost son of Marcellina and Bartolo, so the great impediment to his marriage is effectually removed, and by the happy plan of a disguise the Countess takes Susanna's place at the assignation, and receives the ardent declarations of her husband. When the Count discovers his mistake he is thoroughly ashamed of himself, and his vows of amendment bring the piece to a happy conclusion.

It seems hardly possible to write critically of the music of 'Le Nozze di Figaro,' Mozart had in a superabundant degree that power which is characteristic of our greatest novelists, of infusing the breath of life into his characters. We rise from seeing a performance of 'Le Nozze,' with no consciousness of the art employed, but with a feeling of having assisted in an actual scene in real life. It is not until afterwards that the knowledge is forced upon us that this convincing presentment of nature is the result of a combination of the purest inspiration of genius with the highest development of art. Mozart knew everything that was to be known about music, and 'Le Nozze di Figaro,' in spite of its supreme and unapproachable beauty, is really only the legitimate outcome of two centuries of steady development. Perhaps the most striking feature of the work is the absolute consistency of the whole. In spite of the art with which the composer has individualised his characters, there is no clashing between the different types of music allotted to each. As for the music itself, if the exuberant youthfulness of 'Die Entführung' has been toned down to a serener flow of courtliness, we are compensated for the loss by the absence of the mere *bravura* which disfigures many of the airs in the earlier work. The dominant characteristic of the music is that wise and tender sympathy with the follies and frailties of mankind, which moves us with a deeper pathos than the most terrific tragedy ever penned. It is perhaps the highest achievement of the all-embracing genius of Mozart that he made an artificial comedy of intrigue, which is trivial when it is not squalid, into one of the great music dramas of the world.

Mozart's next work, 'Don Giovanni' (October 29, 1787), was written for Prague, a city which had always shown him more real appreciation than Vienna. It was adapted by Da Ponte from a Spanish tale which had already been utilised by Molière. Although, so far as incident goes, it is not perhaps an ideal libretto, it certainly contains many of the elements of success. The characters are strongly marked and distinct, and the supernatural part of the story, which appealed particularly to Mozart's imagination and indeed determined him to undertake the opera, is managed with consummate skill.

Don Giovanni, a licentious Spanish nobleman, who is attracted by the charms of Donna Anna, the daughter of the Commandant of Seville, breaks into her palace under cover of night, in the hope of making her his own. She resists him and calls for help. In the struggle which ensues the Commandant is killed by Don Giovanni, who escapes unrecognised. Donna Elvira, his deserted wife, has pursued him to Seville, but he employs his servant Leporello to occupy her attention while he pays court to Zerlina, a peasant girl, who is about to marry an honest clodhopper named Masetto. Donna Anna now recognises Don Giovanni as her father's assassin, and communicates her discovery to her lover, Don Ottavio; Elvira joins them, and the three vow vengeance against the libertine. Don Giovanni gives a ball in honour of Zerlina's marriage, and in the course of the festivities seizes an opportunity of trying to seduce her. He is only stopped by the interference of Anna, Elvira, and Ottavio, who have made their way into his palace in masks and dominoes. In the next act the vengeance of the three conspirators appears to hang fire a little, for Don Giovanni is still pursuing his vicious courses, and employing Leporello to beguile the too trustful Elvira. After various escapades he finds himself before the statue of the murdered Commandant. He jokingly invites his old antagonist to sup with him, an invitation which the statue, to his intense surprise, hastens to accept. Leporello and his master return to prepare for the entertainment of the evening. When the merriment is at its height, a heavy step is heard in the corridor, and the marble man enters. Don Giovanni is still undaunted, and even when his terrible visitor offers him the choice between repentance and damnation, yields not a jot of his pride and insolence. Finally the statue grasps him by the hand and drags him down, amid flames and earthquakes, to eternal torment.

The taste of Mozart's time would not permit the drama to finish here. All the other characters have to assemble once more. Leporello gives them an animated description of his master's destruction, and they proceed to draw a most edifying moral from the doom of the sinner. The music to this finale is of matchless beauty and interest, but modern sentiment will not hear of so grievous an anti-climax, and the opera now usually ends with Don Giovanni's disappearance.

The music of 'Don Giovanni' has so often been discussed, that brief reference to its more salient features will be all that is necessary. Gounod has written of it: 'The score of "Don Giovanni" has influenced my life like a revelation. It stands in my thoughts as an incarnation of dramatic and musical impeccability,' and lesser men will be content to echo his words. The plot is less dramatically coherent than that of 'Le Nozze di Figaro,' but it ranges over a far wider gamut of human feeling. From the comic rascality of Leporello to the unearthly terrors of the closing scene is a vast step, but Mozart is equally at home in both. His incomparable art of characterisation is here displayed in even more consummate perfection than in the earlier work. The masterly way in which he differentiates the natures of his three soprani—Anna, a type of noble purity; Elvira, a loving and long-suffering woman, alternating between jealous indignation and voluptuous tenderness; and Zerlina, a model of rustic coquetry—may especially be remarked, but all the characters are treated with the same profound knowledge of life and human nature. Even in his most complicated concerted pieces he never loses grip of the idiosyncrasies of his characters, and in the most piteous and tragic situations he never relinquishes for a moment his pure ideal of intrinsic musical beauty. If there be such a thing as immortality for any work of art, it must surely be conceded to 'Don Giovanni.'

'Così fan tutte,' his next work, was produced at Vienna in January, 1790. It has never been so successful as its two predecessors, chiefly on account of its libretto, which, though a brisk little comedy of intrigue, is almost too slight to bear a musical setting. The plot turns upon a wager laid by two young officers with an old cynic of their acquaintance to prove the constancy of their

respective sweethearts. After a touching leave-taking they return disguised as Albanians and proceed to make violent love each one to the other's *fiancée*. The ladies at first resist the ardent strangers, but end by giving way, and the last scene shows their repentance and humiliation when they discover that the too attractive foreigners are their own lovers after all. There is much delightful music in the work, and it is greatly to be regretted that it should have been so completely cast into the shade by 'Le Nozze di Figaro.'

Mozart's next opera, 'La Clemenza di Tito,' was hastily written, while he was suffering from the illness which in the end proved fatal. The libretto was an adaptation of an earlier work by Metastasio. Cold and formal, and almost totally devoid of dramatic interest, it naturally failed to inspire the composer. The form in which it was cast compelled him to return to the conventions of opera seria, from which he had long escaped, and altogether, as an able critic remarked at the time, the work might rather be taken for the first attempt of budding talent than for the product of a mature mind. The story deals with the plotting of Vitellia, the daughter of the deposed Vitellius, to overthrow the Emperor Titus. She persuades her lover Sextus to conspire against his friend, and he succeeds in setting the Capitol on fire. Titus, however, escapes by means of a disguise, and not only pardons all the conspirators, but rewards Vitellia with his hand. The opera was produced at Prague on the 6th of September, 1791, and the cold reception which it experienced did much to embitter the closing years of Mozart's life.

'Die Zauberflöte,' his last work, was written before 'La Clemenza di Tito,' though not actually produced until September 30, 1791. The libretto, which was the work of Emanuel Schikaneder, is surely the most extraordinary that ever mortal composer was called upon to set.

At the opening of the opera, the Prince Tamino rushes in, pursued by a monstrous serpent, and sinks exhausted on the steps of a temple, from which three ladies issue in the nick of time and despatch the serpent with their silver spears. They give Tamino a portrait of Pamina, the daughter of their mistress, the Queen of Night, which immediately inspires him with passionate devotion. He is informed that Pamina has been stolen by Sarastro, the high-priest of Isis, and imprisoned by him in his palace. He vows to rescue her, and for that purpose is presented by the ladies with a magic flute, which will keep him safe in every danger, while Papageno, a bird-catcher, who has been assigned to him as companion, receives a glockenspiel. Three genii are summoned to guide them, and the two champions thereupon proceed to Sarastro's palace. Tamino is refused admittance by the doorkeeper, but Papageno in some unexplained way contrives to get in, and persuades Pamina to escape with him. They fly, but are recaptured by Monostatos, a Moor, who has been appointed to keep watch over Pamina. Sarastro now appears, condemns Monostatos to the bastinado, and decrees that the two lovers shall undergo a period of probation in the sanctuary. In the second act the ordeal of silence is imposed upon Tamino. Pamina cannot understand his apparent coldness, and is inclined to listen to the counsels of her mother, who tries to induce her to murder Sarastro. The priest, however, convinces her of his beneficent intentions. The lovers go through the ordeals of fire and water successfully, and are happily married. The Queen of Night and her dark kingdom perish everlastingly, and the reign of peace and wisdom is universally established. The humours of Papageno in his search for a wife have nothing to do with the principal interest of the plot, but they serve as an acceptable contrast to the more serious scenes of the opera.

The libretto of the 'Die Zauberflöte' is usually spoken of as the climax of conceivable inanity, but the explanation of many of its absurdities seems to lie in the fact that it is an allegorical illustration of the struggles and final triumph of Freemasonry. Both Mozart and Schikaneder were Freemasons, and 'Die Zauberflöte' is in a sense a manifesto of their belief. Freemasonry in the opera is represented by the mysteries of Isis, over which the high-priest Sarastro presides. The Queen of Night is Maria Theresa, a sworn opponent of Freemasonry, who interdicted its practice throughout her dominions, and broke up the Lodges with armed force. Tamino may be intended for the Emperor Joseph II., who, though not a Freemason himself as his father was, openly protected the brotherhood; and we may look upon Pamina as the representative of the Austrian people. The name of Monostatos seems to be connected with monasticism, and may be intended to typify the

clerical party, which, though outwardly on friendly terms with Freemasonry, seems in reality to have been bent upon its destruction. Papageno and his wife Papagena are excellent representatives of the light-hearted and pleasure-loving population of Vienna. It is difficult to make any explanation fit the story very perfectly, but the suggestion of Freemasonry is enough to acquit Mozart of having allied his music to mere balderdash; while, behind the Masonic business, the discerning hearer will have no difficulty in distinguishing the shadowy outlines of another and a far nobler allegory, the ascent of the human soul, purified by suffering and love, to the highest wisdom. It was this, no doubt, that compelled Goethe's often expressed admiration, and even tempted him to write a sequel to Schikaneder's libretto. 'Die Zauberflöte' is in form a Singspiel—that is to say, the music is interspersed with spoken dialogue—but there the resemblance to Hiller's creations ceases. From the magnificent fugue in the overture to the majestic choral finale, the music is an astonishing combination of divinely beautiful melody with marvels of contrapuntal skill. Perhaps the most surprising part of 'Die Zauberflöte' is the extraordinary ease and certainty with which Mozart manipulates what is practically a new form of art. Nursed as he had been in the traditions of Italian opera, it would not have been strange if he had not been able to shake off the influences of his youth. Yet 'Die Zauberflöte' owes but little to any Italian predecessor. It is German to the core. We may be able to point to passages which are a development of something occurring in the composer's earlier works, such as 'Die Entführung,' but there is hardly anything in the score of 'Die Zauberflöte' which suggests an external influence. Its position in the world of music is ably summarised by Jahn: 'If in his Italian operas Mozart assimilated the traditions of a long period of development and in some sense put the finishing stroke to it, with "Die Zauberflöte" he treads on the threshold of the future, and unlocks for his country the sacred treasure of national art.'

Of Mozart's work as a whole, it is impossible to speak save in terms which seem exaggerated. His influence upon subsequent composers cannot be over-estimated. Without him, Rossini and modern Italian opera, Weber and modern German, Gounod and modern French, would have been impossible. It may be conceded that the form of his operas, with the alternation of airs, concerted pieces and *recitativo secco*, may conceivably strike the ears of the uneducated as old-fashioned, but the feelings of musicians may best be summed up in the word of Gounod: 'O Mozart, divin Mozart! Qu'il faut peu te comprendre pour ne pas t'adorer! Toi, la vérité constante! Toi, la beauté parfaite! Toi, le charme inépuisable! Toi, toujours profond et toujours limpide! Toi, l'humanité complète et la simplicité de l'enfant! Toi, qui as tout ressenti, et tout exprimé dans une langue musicale qu'on n'a jamais surpassée et qu'on ne surpassera jamais.'

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# CHAPTER V

## THE CLOSE OF THE CLASSICAL PERIOD

### MÉHUL—CHERUBINI—SPONTINI—BEETHOVEN—BOIELDIEU

Mozart and Gluck, each in his respective sphere, carried opera to a point which seemed scarcely to admit of further development. But before the advent of Weber and the romantic revolution there was a vast amount of good work done by a lesser order of musicians, who worked on the lines laid down by their great predecessors, and did much to familiarise the world with the new beauties of their masters' work. The history of art often repeats itself in this way. First comes the genius burning with celestial fire. He sweeps away the time-worn formulas, and founds his new art upon their ruins. Then follows the crowd of disciples, men of talent and imagination, though without the crowning impulse that moves the world. They repeat and amplify their leader's maxims, until the world, which at first had stood aghast at teaching so novel, in time grows accustomed to it, and finally accepts it without question. Next comes the final stage, when what has been caviare to one generation is become the daily bread of the next. The innovations of the master, caught up and reproduced by his disciples, in the third generation become the conventional formulas of the art, and the world is ripe once more for a revolution!

Deeply as Gluck's work affected the history of music, his immediate disciples were few. Salieri (1750-1825), an Italian by birth, was chiefly associated with the Viennese court, but wrote his best work, 'Les Danaïdes,' for Paris. He caught the trick of Gluck's grand style cleverly, but was hardly more than an imitator. Sacchini (1734-1786) had a more original vein, though he too was essentially a composer of the second class. He was not actually a pupil of Gluck, though his later works, written for the Paris stage, show the influence of the composer of 'Alceste' very strongly. The greatest of Gluck's immediate followers—the greatest, because he imbibed the principles of his master's art without slavishly reproducing his form—was Méhul (1763-1817), a composer who is so little known in England that it is difficult to speak of him in terms which shall not sound exaggerated to those who are not familiar with his works. How highly he is ranked by French critics may be gathered from the fact that when 'Israel in Egypt' was performed for the first time in Paris some years ago, M. Julien Tiersot, one of the sanest and most clear-headed of contemporary writers on music, gave it as his opinion that Handel's work was less conspicuous for the qualities of dignity and sonority than Méhul's 'Joseph.' Englishmen can scarcely be expected to echo this opinion, but as to the intrinsic greatness of Méhul's work there cannot be any question. He was far more of a scientific musician than Gluck, and his scores have nothing of his master's jejuneness. His melody, too, is dignified and expressive, but he is sensibly inferior to Gluck in what may be called dramatic instinct, and this, coupled with the fact that the libretti of his operas are almost uniformly uninteresting, whereas Gluck's are drawn from the immortal legends of the past, is perhaps enough to explain why the one has been taken and the other left. Méhul's last and greatest work, 'Joseph,' is still performed in France and Germany, though our national prejudices forbid the hope that it can ever be heard in this country except in a mutilated concert version. The opera follows the Biblical story closely, and Méhul has reproduced the large simplicity of the Old Testament with rare felicity. From the magnificent opening air, 'Champs paternels,' to the sonorous final chorus, the work is rich in beauty of a very high order. Of his other serious works few have remained in the current repertory, chiefly owing to their stupid libretti, for there is not one of them that does not contain music of rare excellence. 'Stratonice,' a dignified setting of the pathetic old story of the prince who loves his father's betrothed, deserves to live if only for the sake of the noble air, 'Versez tous vos chagrins,' a masterpiece of sublime tenderness as fine as anything in Gluck. 'Uthal,' a work upon an Ossianic legend, has recently been revived with success in Germany. It embodies a curious experiment in orchestration, the violins being entirely absent from the score. The composer's idea, no doubt, was to represent by this means the grey colouring and misty atmosphere of the scene in which his opera was laid, but the originality of the idea scarcely atones



for the monotony in which it resulted. Although his genius was naturally of a serious and dignified cast, Méhul wrote many works in a lighter vein, partly no doubt in emulation of Grétry, the prince of opéra comique. Méhul's comic operas are often deficient in sparkle, but their musical force and the enchanting melodies with which they are begemmed have kept them alive, and several of them—'Une Folie,' for instance, and 'Le Trésor Supposé'—have been performed in Germany during the last decade, while 'L'Irato,' a brilliant imitation of Italian opera buffa, has recently been given at Brussels with great success.

Although born in Florence and educated in the traditions of the Neapolitan school, Cherubini (1760-1842) belongs by right to the French school. His 'Lodoiska,' which was produced in Paris in 1791, established his reputation; and 'Les Deux Journées' (1800), known in England as 'The Water-Carrier,' placed him, in the estimation of Beethoven, at the head of all living composers of opera. Posterity has scarcely endorsed Beethoven's dictum, but it is impossible to ignore the beauty of Cherubini's work. The solidity of his concerted pieces and the picturesqueness of his orchestration go far to explain the enthusiasm which his works aroused in a society which as yet knew little, if anything, of Mozart. Cherubini's finest works suffer from a frigidity and formality strangely in contrast with the grace of Grétry or the melody of Méhul, but the infinite resources of his musicianship make amends for lack of inspiration, and 'Les Deux Journées' may still be listened to with pleasure, if not with enthusiasm. The scene of the opera is laid in Paris, under the rule of Cardinal Mazarin, who has been defied by Armand, the hero of the story. The gates of Paris are strictly guarded, and every precaution is taken to prevent Armand's escape; but he is saved by Mikeli, a water-carrier, whose son he had once befriended, and who now repays the favour by conveying him out of Paris in his empty water-cart. Armand escapes to a village near Paris, but is captured by the Cardinal's troops while protecting his wife Constance, who has followed him, from the insults of two soldiers. In the end a pardon arrives from the Queen, and all ends happily. In spite of the serious and even tragic cast of the plot, the use of spoken dialogue compels us to class 'Les Deux Journées' as an opéra comique; and the same rule applies to 'Médée,' Cherubini's finest work, an opera which for dignity of thought and grandeur of expression deserves to rank high among the productions of the period. Lesueur (1763-1837) may fitly be mentioned by the side of Méhul and Cherubini. His opera 'Les Bardes,' though now forgotten, has qualities of undeniable excellence. Its faults as well as its beauties are those of the period which produced it. It is declamatory rather than lyrical, and decorative rather than dramatic, but in the midst of its conventions and formality there is much that is true as well as picturesque.

During the closing years of the eighteenth and at the beginning of the nineteenth century the activity of the French school of opera is in remarkable contrast with the stagnation which prevailed in Italy and Germany. Italy, a slave to the facile graces of the Neapolitan school, still awaited the composer who should strike off her chains and renew the youth of her national art; while Germany, among the crowds of imitators who clung to the skirts of Mozart's mantle, could not produce one worthy to follow in his steps. Yet though French opera embodied the finest thought and aspiration of the day, it is only just to observe that the impetus which impelled her composers upon new paths of progress came largely from external sources. It is curious to note how large a share foreigners have had in building up the fabric of French opera. Lulli, Gluck, and Cherubini in turn devoted their genius to its service. They were followed by Spontini (1774-1851), who in spite of chauvinistic prejudice, became, on the production of 'La Vestale' in 1807, the most popular composer of the day. Spontini's training was Neapolitan, but his first visit to Paris showed him that there was no place upon the French stage for the trivialities which still delighted Italian audiences. He devoted himself to careful study, and his one-act opera 'Milton,' the first-fruits of his musicianship, showed a remarkable advance upon his youthful efforts. Spontini professed an adoration for Mozart which bordered upon idolatry, but his music shows rather the influence of Gluck. He is the last of what may be called the classical school of operatic composers, and he shows little trace of the romanticism which was beginning to lay its hand upon music. He was accused during his lifetime of overloading his operas with orchestration, and of writing music which it was impossible to sing—accusations which sound strangely familiar to those who are old enough to remember the reception of Wagner in the seventies and eighties. His scores would not sound

very elaborate nowadays, nor do his melodies appear unusually tortuous or exacting, but he insisted upon violent contrasts from his singers as well as from his orchestra, and the great length of his operas, a point in which he anticipated Meyerbeer and Wagner, probably reduced to exhaustion the artists who were trained on Gluck and Mozart. 'La Vestale' was followed in 1809 by 'Fernand Cortez,' and in 1819 by 'Olympie,' both of which were extremely successful, the latter in a revised form which was produced at Berlin in 1821. Spontini's operas are now no longer performed, but the influence which his music exercised upon men so different as Wagner and Meyerbeer makes his name important in the history of opera.

Although Paris was the nursery of all that was best in opera at this period, to Germany belongs the credit of producing the one work dating from the beginning of the nineteenth century which deserves to rank with the masterpieces of the previous generation—Beethoven's 'Fidelio.' Beethoven's (1770-1827) one contribution to the lyric stage was written in 1804 and 1805, and was produced at Vienna in the latter year, during the French occupation. The libretto is a translation from the French, and the story had already formed the basis of more than one opera; indeed, it was a performance of Paer's 'Eleonora' which originally led Beethoven to think of writing his work. Simple as it is, the plot has true nobility of design, and the purity of its motive contrasts favourably with the tendency of the vast majority of lyric dramas. Florestan, a Spanish nobleman, has fallen into the power of his bitterest enemy, Pizarro, the governor of a state prison near Madrid. There the unfortunate Florestan is confined in a loathsome dungeon without light or air, dependent upon the mercy of Pizarro for the merest crust of bread. Leonore, the unhappy prisoner's wife, has discovered his place of confinement, and, in the hope of rescuing him, disguises herself in male attire and hires herself as servant to Rocco, the head gaoler, under the name of Fidelio. In this condition she has to endure the advances of Marcelline, the daughter of Rocco, who neglects her lover Jaquino for the sake of the attractive new-comer. Before Leonore has had time to mature her plans, news comes to the prison of the approaching visit of the Minister Fernando on a tour of inspection. Pizarro's only chance of escaping the detection of his crime is to put an end to Florestan's existence, and he orders Rocco to dig a grave in the prisoner's cell. Leonore obtains leave to help the gaoler in his task, and together they descend to the dungeon, where the unfortunate Florestan is lying in a half inanimate condition. When their task is finished Pizarro himself comes down, and is on the point of stabbing Florestan, when Leonore throws herself between him and his victim, a pistol in her hand, and threatens the assassin with instant death if he advance a step. At that moment a flourish of trumpets announces the arrival of Fernando. Pizarro is forced to hurry off to receive his guest, and the husband and wife rush into each other's arms. The closing scene shows the discomfiture and disgrace of Pizarro, and the restoration of Florestan to his lost honours and dignity.

The form of 'Fidelio,' like that of "Die Zauberflöte," is that of the Singspiel. In the earlier and lighter portions of the work the construction of the drama does not differ materially from that of the generality of Singspiele, but in the more tragic scenes the spoken dialogue is employed with novel and extraordinary force. So far from suggesting any feeling of anti-climax, the sudden relapse into agitated speech often gives an effect more thrilling than any music could command. At two points in the drama this is especially remarkable—firstly, in the prison quartet, after the flourish of trumpets, when Jaquino comes in breathless haste to announce the arrival of the Minister; and secondly, in the brief dialogue between the husband and wife which separates the quartet from the following duet. Leonore's famous words, 'Nichts, nichts, mein Florestan,' in particular, if spoken with a proper sense of their exquisite truth and beauty, sum up the passionate devotion of the true-hearted wife, and her overflowing happiness at the realisation of her dearest hopes, in a manner which for genuine pathos can scarcely be paralleled upon the operatic stage.

It is hardly necessary to point out to the student of opera the steady influence which Mozart's music exercised upon Beethoven's development. Yet although Beethoven learnt much from the composer of 'Don Giovanni,' there is a great deal in 'Fidelio' with which Mozart had nothing to do. The attitude of Beethoven towards opera—to go no deeper than questions of form—was radically different from that of Mozart. Beethoven's talent was essentially symphonic rather than dramatic,

and magnificent as 'Fidelio' is, it has many passages in which it is impossible to avoid feeling that the composer is forcing his talent into an unfamiliar if not uncongenial channel. This is especially noticeable in the concerted pieces, in which Beethoven sometimes seems to forget all about opera, characters, dramatic situation and everything else in the sheer delight of writing music. No one with an ounce of musical taste in his composition would wish the canon-quartet, the two trios or the two finales, to take a few instances at random, any shorter or less developed than they are, but one can imagine how Mozart would have smiled at the lack of dramatic feeling displayed in their construction.

'Fidelio,' as has already been said, is the only opera produced in Germany at this period which is deserving of special mention. Mozart's success had raised up a crop of imitators, of whom the most meritorious were Süssmayer, his own pupil; Winter, who had the audacity to write a sequel to 'Die Zauberflöte'; Weigl, the composer of the popular 'Schweizerfamilie' the Abbé Vogler, who, though now known chiefly by his organ music, was a prolific writer for the stage; and Dittersdorf, a writer of genuine humour, whose spirited Singspiel, 'Doktor und Apotheker,' carried on the traditions of Hiller successfully. But though the lighter school of opera in Germany produced nothing of importance, upon the more congenial soil of France *opéra comique*, in the hands of a school of earnest and gifted composers, was acquiring a musical distinction which it was far from possessing in the days of Grétry and Monsigny. Strictly speaking, the operas of Méhul and Cherubini should be ranked as *opéras comiques*, by reason of the spoken dialogue which takes the place of the recitative; but the high seriousness which continually animates the music of these masters makes it impossible to class their works with operas so different in aim and execution as those of Grétry. Of the many writers of *opéra comique* at the beginning of this century, it will be enough to mention two of the most prominent, Nicolo and Boieldieu. Nicolo Isouard (1777-1818), to give him his full name, shone less by musical science or dramatic instinct than by a delicate and pathetic grace which endeared his music to the hearts of his contemporaries. He had little originality, and his facility often descends to commonplace, but much of the music in 'Joconde' and 'Cendrillon' lives by grace of its inimitable tenderness and charm. Nicolo is the Greuze of music. Boieldieu (1775-1834) stands upon a very different plane. Although he worked within restricted limits, his originality and resource place him among the great masters of French music. His earlier works are, for the most, light and delicate trifles; but in 'Jean de Paris' (1812) and 'La Dame Blanche' (1825), to name only two of his many successful works, he shows real solidity of style and no little command of musical invention, combined with the delicate melody and pathetic grace which rarely deserted him. The real strength and distinction of 'La Dame Blanche' have sufficed to keep it alive until the present day, although it has never, in spite of the Scottish origin of the libretto, won in this country a tithe of the popularity which it enjoys in France. The story is a combination of incidents taken from Scott's 'Monastery' and 'Guy Mannering.' The Laird of Avenel, who was obliged to fly from Scotland after the battle of Culloden, entrusted his estates to his steward Gaveston. Many years having passed without tidings of the absentee, Gaveston determines to put the castle and lands up for sale. He has sedulously fostered a tradition which is current among the villagers, that the castle is haunted by a White Lady, hoping by this means to deter any of the neighbouring farmers from competing with him for the estate. The day before the sale takes place, Dickson, one of the farmers, is summoned to the castle by Anna, an orphan girl who had been befriended by the Laird. Dickson is too superstitious to venture, but his place is taken by George Brown, a young soldier, who arrived at the village that day. George has an interview with the White Lady, who is of course Anna in disguise. She recognises George as the man whose life she saved after a battle, and knowing him to be the rightful heir of Avenel, promises to help him in recovering his property. She has discovered that treasure is concealed in a statue of the White Lady, and with this she empowers George to buy back his ancestral lands and castle. Gaveston is outbidden at the sale, and George weds Anna. Boieldieu's music has much melodic beauty, though its tenderness is apt to degenerate into sentimentality. In its original form the opera would nowadays be unbearably tiresome, and only a judicious shortening of the interminable duets and trios can make them tolerable to a modern audience. In spite of much that is conventional and old-fashioned, the alternate vigour and grace of 'La Dame Blanche' and the genuine musical interest of

the score make it the most favourable specimen of this period of French opéra comique. It is the last offspring of the older school. After Boieldieu's time the influence of Rossini became paramount, and opéra comique, unable to resist a spell so formidable, began to lose its distinctively national characteristics.

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# CHAPTER VI

## WEBER AND THE ROMANTIC SCHOOL

WEBER—SPOHR—MARSCHNER—KREUTZER—LORTZING—NICOLAI—FLOTOW—MENDELSSOHN—  
SCHUBERT—SCHUMANN

Although, for the sake of convenience, it is customary to speak of Weber as the founder of the romantic school in music, it must not be imagined that the new school sprang into being at the production of 'Der Freischütz.' For many years the subtle influence of the romantic school in literature—the circle which gathered round Tieck, Fichte, and the Schlegels—had been felt in music. We have seen how the voluptuous delights of Armida's garden affected even the stately muse of Gluck; and in the generation which succeeded him, though opera still followed classic lines of form, in subject and treatment it was tinged with the prismatic colours of romance. Méhul's curious experiments in orchestration, and the solemn splendour of Mozart's Egyptian mysteries, alike show the influence of the romantic spirit as surely as the weirdest piece of *diablerie* ever devised by Weber or his followers. Yet though intimations of the approaching change had for long been perceptible to the discerning eye, it was not until the days of Weber that the classical forms and methods which had ruled the world of opera since the days of Gluck gave way before the newer and more vivid passion of romance. Even then it must not be forgotten that the romantic school differed from the classic more in view of life and treatment of subject than in actual subject itself. The word romance conjures up weird visions of the supernatural or glowing pictures of chivalry; but although it is true that Weber and his followers loved best to treat of such themes as these, they had by no means been excluded from the repertory of their classical predecessors. The supernatural terrors of 'Der Freischütz' must not make us forget the terrific finale to 'Don Giovanni,' nor can the most glowing picture from 'Euryanthe' erase memories of Rinaldo and the Crusaders in 'Armide.' The romantic movement, however, as interpreted by Weber, aimed definitely at certain things, which had not previously come within the scope of music, though for many years they had been the common property of art and literature. The romantic movement was primarily a revolt against the tyranny of man and his emotions. It claimed a wider stage and an ampler air. Nature was not henceforth to be merely the background against which man played his part. The beauty of landscape, the glory of the setting sun, the splendour of the sea, the mystery of the forest—all these the romantic movement taught men to regard not merely as the accessories of a scene in which man was the predominant figure, but as subjects in themselves worthy of artistic treatment. The genius of Weber (1786-1826) was a curious compound of two differing types. In essence it was thoroughly German—sane in inspiration, and drawing its strength from the homely old Volkslieder, so dear to every true German heart. Yet over this solid foundation there soared an imagination surely more delicate and ethereal than has ever been allotted to mortal musician before or since, by the aid of which Weber was enabled to treat all subjects beneath heaven with equal success. He is equally at home in the eerie horrors of the Wolf's Glen, in the moonlit revels of Oberon, and in the knightly pomp and circumstance of the Provençal court.

Weber's early years were a continual struggle against defeat and disappointment. His musical education was somewhat superficial, and his first works, 'Sylvana' and 'Peter Schmoll,' gave little promise of his later glory. 'Abu Hassan,' a one-act comic opera, which was produced in 1811, at Munich, was his first real success. Slight as the story is, it is by no means unamusing, and the music, which is a piece of the daintiest filagree-work imaginable, has helped to keep the little work alive to the present day. Such plot as there is describes the shifts of Hassan and Fatima, his wife, to avoid paying their creditors, who are unduly pressing in their demands. Finally they both pretend to be dead, and by this means excite the regret of their master and mistress, the Sultan and Sultana, a regret which takes the practical form of releasing them from their embarrassments.

In 'Der Freischütz' Weber was at last in his true element. The plot of the opera is founded upon

an old forest legend of a demon who persuades huntsmen to sell their souls in exchange for magic bullets which never miss their mark. Caspar, who is a ranger in the service of Prince Ottokar of Bohemia, had sold himself to the demon Samiel. The day is approaching when his soul will become forfeit to the powers of evil, unless he can bring a fresh victim in his place. He looks around him for a possible substitute, and his choice falls upon Max, another ranger, who had been unlucky in the preliminary contest for the post of chief huntsman, and is only too ready to listen to Caspar's promise of unerring bullets. Max loves Agathe, the daughter of Kuno, the retiring huntsman, and unless he can secure the vacant post, he has little hope of being able to marry her. He agrees eagerly to Caspar's proposal, and promises to meet him at midnight in the haunted Wolf's Glen, there to go through the ceremony of casting the magic bullets. Meanwhile Agathe is oppressed by forebodings of coming evil. The fall of an old picture seems to her a presage of woe, and her lively cousin Aennchen can do little to console her. The appearance of Max on his way to the Wolf's Glen, cheers her but little. He too has been troubled by strange visions, and as the moment of the rendezvous approaches his courage begins to fail. Nevertheless he betakes himself to the Glen, and there, amidst scenes of the wildest supernatural horror, the bullets are cast in the presence of the terrible Samiel himself. Six of them are for Max, to be used by him in the approaching contest, while the seventh will be at the disposal of the demon. In the third act Agathe is discovered preparing for her wedding. She has dreamed that, in the shape of a dove, she was shot by Max, and she cannot shake off a sense of approaching trouble. Her melancholy is not dissipated by the discovery that, instead of a bridal crown, a funeral wreath has been prepared for her; however, to console herself, she determines to wear a wreath of sacred roses, which had been given her by the hermit of the forest. The last scene shows the shooting contest on which the future of Max and Agathe depends. Max makes six shots in succession, all of which hit the mark. At last, at the Prince's command, he fires at a dove which is flying past. Agathe falls with a shriek, but is protected by her wreath, while Samiel directs the bullet to Caspar's heart. At the sight of his associate's fate Max is stricken with remorse, and tells the story of his unholy compact. The Prince is about to banish him from his service, when the hermit appears and intercedes for the unfortunate youth. The Prince is mollified, and it is decided that Max shall have a year's probation, after which he shall be permitted to take the post of chief huntsman and marry Agathe.

'Der Freischütz' is, upon the whole, the most thoroughly characteristic of Weber's works. The famous passage for the horns, with which the overture opens, strikes the note of mystery and romance which echoes through the work. The overture itself is a notable example of that new beauty which Weber infused into the time-honoured form. If he was not actually the first—for Beethoven had already written his 'Leonore' overtures—to make the overture a picture in brief of the incidents of the opera, he developed the idea with so much picturesque power and imagination that the preludes to his operas remain the envy and despair of modern theatrical composers. The inspiration of 'Der Freischütz' is drawn so directly from the German Volkslied, that at its production Weber was roundly accused of plagiarism by many critics. Time has shown the folly of such charges. 'Der Freischütz' is German to the core, and every page of it bears the impress of German inspiration, but the glamour of Weber's genius transmuted the rough material he employed into a fabric of the richest art. Of the imaginative power of such scenes as the famous incantation it is unnecessary to speak. It introduced a new element into music, and one which was destined to have an almost immeasurable influence upon modern music. Weber's power of characterisation was remarkable, as shown particularly in the music assigned to Agathe and Aennchen, but in this respect he was certainly inferior to some of his predecessors, notably to Mozart. But in imaginative power and in the minute knowledge of orchestral detail, which enabled him to translate his conceptions into music, he has never been surpassed among writers for the stage. Modern opera, if we may speak in general terms, may be said to date from the production of 'Der Freischütz.'

Operatic composers are too often dogged by a fate which seems to compel them to wed their noblest inspirations to libretti of incorrigible dulness, and Weber was even more unfortunate in this respect than his brethren of the craft. After 'Der Freischütz,' the libretti which he took in hand were of the most unworthy description, and even his genius has not been able to give them immortality. 'Euryanthe' was the work of Helmine von Chezy, the authoress of 'Rosamunde,' for which Schubert

wrote his entrancing incidental music. Weber was probably attracted by the romantic elements of the story, the chivalry of mediæval France, the marches and processions, the pomp and glitter of the court, and overlooked the weak points of the plot. To tell the truth, much of the libretto of 'Euryanthe' borders upon the incomprehensible. The main outline of the story is as follows. At a festival given by the King of France, Count Adolar praises the beauty and virtue of his betrothed Euryanthe, and Lysiart, who also loves her, offers to wager all he possesses that he will contrive to gain her love. Adolar accepts the challenge, and Lysiart departs for Nevers, where Euryanthe is living. The second act discovers Euryanthe and Eglantine, an outcast damsel whom she has befriended. Eglantine secretly loves Adolar, but extracts a promise from Lysiart, who has arrived at Nevers, that he will marry her. In return for this she gives him a ring belonging to Euryanthe, which she has stolen, and tells him a secret relating to a mysterious Emma, a sister of Adolar, which Euryanthe has incautiously revealed to her. Armed with these Lysiart returns to the court, and quickly persuades Adolar and the King that he has won Euryanthe's affection. No one listens to her denials; she is condemned to death, and Adolar's lands and titles are given to Lysiart. Euryanthe is led into the desert to be killed by Adolar. On the way he is attacked by a serpent, which he kills, though not before Euryanthe has proved her devotion by offering to die in her lover's place. Adolar then leaves Euryanthe to perish, declaring that he has not the heart to kill her. She is found in a dying condition by the King, whom she speedily convinces of her innocence. Meanwhile Adolar has returned to Nevers, to encounter the bridal procession of Eglantine and Lysiart. Eglantine confesses that she helped to ruin Euryanthe in the hope of winning Adolar, and is promptly stabbed by Lysiart. Everything being satisfactorily cleared up, Euryanthe conveniently awakes from a trance into which she had fallen, and the lovers are finally united. Puerile as the libretto is, it inspired Weber with some of the finest music he ever wrote. The spectacular portions of the opera are animated by the true spirit of chivalry, while all that is connected with the incomprehensible Emma and her secret is unspeakably eerie. The characters of the drama are such veritable puppets, that no expenditure of talent could make them interesting; but the resemblance between the general scheme of the plot of 'Euryanthe' and that of 'Lohengrin' should not be passed over, nor the remarkable way in which Weber had anticipated some of Wagner's most brilliant triumphs, notably in the characters of Eglantine and Lysiart, who often seem curiously to foreshadow Ortrud and Telramund, and in the finale to the second act, in which the single voice of Euryanthe, like that of Elisabeth in 'Tannhäuser,' is contrasted with the male chorus.

Weber's last opera, 'Oberon,' is one of the few works written in recent times by a foreign composer of the first rank for the English stage. The libretto, which was the work of Planché, is founded upon an old French romance, 'Huon of Bordeaux,' and though by no means a model of lucidity, it contains many scenes both powerful and picturesque, which must have captivated the imagination of a musician so impressionable as Weber. The opera opens in fairyland, where a bevy of fairies is watching the slumbers of Oberon. The fairy king has quarrelled with Titania, and has vowed never to be reconciled to her until he shall find two lovers constant to each other through trial and temptation. Puck, who has been despatched to search for such a pair, enters with the news that Sir Huon of Bordeaux, who had accidentally slain the son of Charlemagne, has been commanded, in expiation of his crime, to journey to Bagdad, to claim the Caliph's daughter as his bride, and slay the man who sits at his right hand. Oberon forthwith throws Huon into a deep sleep, and in a vision shows him Rezia, the daughter of the Caliph, of whom the ardent knight instantly becomes enamoured. He then conveys him to the banks of the Tigris, and giving him a magic horn, starts him upon his dangerous enterprise. In the Caliph's palace Huon fights with Babekan, Rezia's suitor, rescues the maiden, and with the aid of the magic horn carries her off from the palace, while his esquire Sherasmin performs the same kind office for Fatima, Rezia's attendant. On their way home they encounter a terrific storm, raised by the power of Oberon to try their constancy. They are ship-wrecked, and Rezia is carried off by pirates to Tunis, whilst Huon is left for dead upon the beach. At Tunis more troubles are in store for the hapless pair. Huon, who has been transported by the fairies across the sea, finds his way into the house of the Emir, where Rezia is in slavery. There he is unlucky enough to win the favour of Roshana, the Emir's wife, and before he can escape from her embraces he is discovered by the Emir himself, and condemned to

be burned alive. Rezia proclaims herself his wife, and she also is condemned to the stake; but at this crisis Oberon intervenes. The lovers have been tried enough, and their constancy is rewarded. They are transported to the court of Charlemagne, where a royal welcome awaits them.

Although written for England, 'Oberon' has never achieved much popularity in this, or indeed in any country. The fairy music is exquisite throughout, but the human interest of the story is after all slight, and Weber, on whom the hand of death was heavy as he wrote the score, failed to infuse much individuality into his characters. 'Oberon' was his last work, and he died in London soon after it was produced. During the last few years of his life he had been engaged in a desultory way upon the composition of a comic opera, 'Die drei Pintos,' founded upon a Spanish subject. He left this in an unfinished state, but some time after his death it was found that the manuscript sketches and notes for the work were on a scale sufficiently elaborate to give a proper idea of what the composer's intentions with regard to the work really were. The work of arrangement was entrusted to Herr G. Mahler, and under his auspices 'Die drei Pintos' was actually produced, though with little success.

At the present time the only opera of Weber which can truthfully be said to belong to the current repertory is 'Der Freischütz,' and even this is rarely performed out of Germany. The small amount of favour which 'Euryanthe' and 'Oberon' enjoy is due, as has been already pointed out, chiefly to the weakness of their libretti, yet it seems strange that the man to whom the whole tendency of modern opera is due should hold so small a place in our affections. The changes which Weber and his followers effected, though less drastic, were in their results fully as important as those of Gluck. In the orchestra as well as on the stage he introduced a new spirit, a new point of view. What modern music owes to him may be summed up in a word. Without Weber, Wagner would have been impossible.

Louis Spohr (1784-1859) is now almost forgotten as an operatic composer, but at one time his popularity was only second to that of Weber. Many competent critics have constantly affirmed that a day will come when Spohr's operas, now neglected, will return to favour once more; but years pass, and there seems no sign of a revival of interest in his work. Yet he has a certain importance in the history of opera; for, so far as chronology is concerned, he ought perhaps to be termed the founder of the romantic school rather than Weber, since his 'Faust' was produced in 1818, and 'Der Freischütz' did not appear until 1821. But the question seems to turn not so much upon whether Spohr or Weber were first in the field, as whether Spohr is actually a romantic composer at all. If the subjects which he treated were all that need be taken into account, the matter could easily be decided. No composer ever dealt more freely in the supernatural than Spohr. His operas are peopled with elves, ghosts, and goblins. Ruined castles, midnight assassins, and distressed damsels greet us on every page. But if we go somewhat deeper, we find that the real qualities of romanticism are strangely absent from his music. His form differs little from that of his classical predecessors, and his orchestration is curiously arid and unsuggestive; in a word, the breath of imagination rarely animates his pages. Yet the workmanship of his operas is so admirable, and his vein of melody is so delicate and refined, that it is difficult to help thinking that Spohr has been unjustly neglected. His 'Faust,' which has nothing to do with Goethe's drama, was popular in England fifty years ago; and 'Jessonda,' which contains the best of his music, is still occasionally performed in Germany. The rest of his works, with the exception of a few scattered airs, such as 'Rose softly blooming,' from 'Zemire und Azor,' seem to be completely forgotten.

Heinrich Marschner (1796-1861), though not a pupil of Weber, was strongly influenced by his music, and carried on the traditions of the romantic school worthily and well. He was a man of vivid imagination, and revelled in uncanny legends of the supernatural. His works are performed with tolerable frequency in Germany, and still please by reason of their inexhaustible flow of melody and their brilliant and elaborate orchestration. 'Hans Heiling,' his masterpiece, is founded upon a sombre old legend of the Erzgebirge. The king of the gnomes has seen and loved a Saxon maiden, Anna by name, and to win her heart he leaves his palace in the bowels of the earth and masquerades as a village schoolmaster under the name of Hans Heiling. Anna is flattered by his attentions, and promises to be his wife; but she soon tires of her gloomy lover, and ends by openly



admitting her preference for the hunter Conrad. Her resolution to break with Hans is confirmed by an apparition of the queen of the gnomes, Hans Heiling's mother, surrounded by her attendant sprites, who warns her under fearful penalties to forswear the love of an immortal. Hans Heiling is furious at the perfidy of Anna, and vows terrible vengeance upon her and Conrad, which he is about to put into execution with the aid of his gnomes. At the last moment, however, his mother appears, and persuades him to relinquish all hopes of earthly love and to return with her to their subterranean home. There is much in this strange story which suggests the legend of the Flying Dutchman, and, bearing in mind the admiration which in his early days Wagner felt for the works of Marschner, it is interesting to trace in 'Hans Heiling' the source of much that is familiar to us in the score of 'Der Fliegende Holländer.' Of Marschner's other operas, the most familiar are 'Templer und Jüdin,' founded upon Sir Walter Scott's 'Ivanhoe,' a fine work, suffering from a confused and disconnected libretto; and 'Der Vampyr,' a tale of unmitigated gloom and horror.

Weber and Marschner show the German romantic school at its best; for the lesser men, such as Hoffmann and Lindpaintner, did little but reproduce the salient features of their predecessors more or less faithfully. The romantic school is principally associated with the sombre dramas, in which the taste of that time delighted; but there was another side to the movement which must not be neglected. The Singspiel, established by Hiller and perfected by Mozart, had languished during the early years of the century, or rather had fallen into the hands of composers who were entirely unable to do justice to its possibilities. The romantic movement touched it into new life, and a school arose which contrived by dint of graceful melody and ingenious orchestral device to invest with real musical interest the simple stories in which the German middle-class delights. The most successful of these composers were Kreutzer and Lortzing.

Conradin Kreutzer (1782-1849) was a prolific composer, but the only one of his operas which can honestly be said to have survived to our times is 'Das Nachtlager von Granada.' This tells the tale of an adventure which befell the Prince Regent of Spain. While hunting in the mountains he falls in with Gabriela, a pretty peasant maiden who is in deep distress. She confides to him that her affairs of the heart have gone awry. Her lover, Gomez the shepherd, is too poor to marry, and her father wishes her to accept the Croesus of the village, a man whom she detests. The handsome huntsman—for such she supposes him to be—promises to intercede for her with his patron the Prince, and when her friends and relations, a band of arrant smugglers and thieves, appear, he tries to buy their consent to her union with Gomez by means of a gold chain which he happens to be wearing. The sight of so much wealth arouses the cupidity of the knaves, and they at once brew a plot to murder the huntsman in his sleep. Luckily Gabriela overhears their scheming, and puts the Prince upon his guard. The assassins find him prepared for their assault, and ready to defend himself to the last drop of blood. Fortunately matters do not come to a climax. A body of the Prince's attendants arrive in time to prevent any bloodshed, and the opera ends with the discomfiture of the villains and the happy settlement of Gabriela's love affairs. Kreutzer's music is for the most part slight, and occasionally borders upon the trivial, but several scenes are treated in the true romantic spirit, and some of the concerted pieces are admirably written. Lortzing (1803-1852) was a more gifted musician than Kreutzer, and several of his operas are still exceedingly popular in Germany. The scene of 'Czar und Zimmermann,' which is fairly well known in England as 'Peter the Shipwright,' is laid at Saardam, where Peter the Great is working in a shipyard under the name of Michaelhoff. There is another Russian employed in the same yard, a deserter named Peter Ivanhoff, and the very slight incidents upon which the action of the opera hinges arise from the mistakes of a blundering burgomaster who confuses the identity of the two men. The music is exceedingly bright and tuneful, and much of it is capitally written. Scarcely less popular in Germany than 'Czar und Zimmermann' is 'Der Wildschütz' (The Poacher), a bustling comedy of intrigue and disguise, which owes its name to the mistake of a foolish old village schoolmaster, who fancies that he has shot a stag in the baronial preserves. The chief incidents in the piece arise from the humours of a vivacious baroness, who disguises herself as a servant in order to make the acquaintance of her *fiancé*, unknown to him. The music of 'Der Wildschütz' is no less bright and unpretentious than that of 'Czar und Zimmermann'; in fact, these two works may be taken as good specimens of Lortzing's engaging talent. His strongest points are a clever knack of treating the

voices contrapuntally in concerted pieces, and a humorous trick of orchestration, two features with which English audiences have become pleasantly familiar in Sir Arthur Sullivan's operettas, which works indeed owe not a little to the influence of Lortzing and Kreutzer.

Inferior even to the slightest of the minor composers of the romantic school was Flotow, whose 'Martha' nevertheless has survived to our time, while hundreds of works far superior in every way have perished irretrievably. Flotow (1812-1883) was a German by birth, but his music is merely a feeble imitation of the popular Italianisms of the day. 'Martha' tells the story of a freakish English lady who, with her maid, disguises herself as a servant and goes to the hiring fair at Richmond. There they fall in with an honest farmer of the neighbourhood named Plunket, and his friend Lionel, who promptly engage them. The two couples soon fall in love with each other, but various hindrances arise which serve to prolong the story into four weary acts. Flotow had a certain gift of melody, and the music of 'Martha' has the merit of a rather trivial tunefulness, but the score is absolutely devoid of any real musical interest, and the fact that performances of such a work as 'Martha' are still possible in London gives an unfortunate impression of the standard of musical taste prevailing in England. Otto Nicolai (1810-1849) began by imitating Italian music, but in 'Die lustigen Weiber von Windsor,' a capital adaptation of Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' which was only produced a few months before his death, he returned to the type of comic opera which was popular at that time in Germany. He was an excellent musician, and the captivating melody of this genial little work is supplemented by excellent concerted writing and thoroughly sound orchestration.

To this period belong the operas written by three composers who in other branches of music have won immortality, although their dramatic works have failed to win lasting favour.

Mendelssohn's (1809-1847) boyish opera 'Die Hochzeit des Camacho' is too inexperienced a work to need more than a passing word, and his Liederspiel 'Heimkehr aus der Fremde' is little more than a collection of songs; but the finale to his unfinished 'Lorelei' shows that he possessed genuine dramatic power, and it must be a matter for regret that his difficulties in fixing on a libretto prevented his giving anything to the permanent repertory of the stage.

Schubert (1797-1828) wrote many works for the stage—romantic operas like 'Fierrabras' and 'Alfonso und Estrella,' operettas like 'Der häusliche Krieg,' and farces like 'Die Zwillinge brüder.' Most of them were saddled by inane libretti, and though occasionally revived by enthusiastic admirers of the composer, only prove that Schubert's talent was essentially not dramatic, however interesting his music may be to musicians.

Schumann's (1810-1856) one contribution to the history of opera, 'Genoveva,' is decidedly more important, and indeed it seems possible that after many years of neglect it may at last take a place in the modern repertory. It is founded upon a tragedy by Hebbel, and tells of the passion of Golo for Genoveva, the wife of his patron Siegfried, his plot to compromise her, and the final triumph of the constant wife. The music cannot be said to be undramatic; on the contrary, Schumann often realises the situations with considerable success: but he had little power of characterisation, and all the characters sing very much the same kind of music. This gives a feeling of monotony to the score, which is hardly dispelled even by the many beauties with which it is adorned. Nevertheless 'Genoveva' has been revived in several German towns of late years, and its music has always met with much applause from connoisseurs, though it is never likely to be generally popular.

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## CHAPTER VII

### ROSSINI, DONIZETTI, AND BELLINI

While Weber was reconstructing opera in Germany and laying the foundations upon which the vast structure of modern lyrical drama was afterwards reared by the composers of our own day, reforms, or at any rate innovations, were being introduced into Italian opera by a musician scarcely less gifted even than the founder of the romantic school himself. Rossini (1792-1868) owed but little of his fame to instruction or study. As soon as he had been assured by his master that he knew enough of the grammar of music to write an opera, he relinquished his studies once for all, and started life as a composer. In this perhaps he showed his wisdom, for his natural gifts were of such a nature as could scarcely have been enhanced by erudition, and the mission which he so amply fulfilled in freeing his national art from eighteenth-century convention was certainly not one which depended upon a profound knowledge of counterpoint. Nature had fortunately endowed him with precisely the equipment necessary for the man who was to reform Italian opera. The school of Paisiello, notwithstanding its many merits, had several grievous weaknesses, of which the most prominent were uniformity of melodic type, nerveless and conventional orchestration, and intolerable prolixity. Rossini brought to his task a vein of melody as inexhaustible in inspiration as it was novel in form, a natural instinct for instrumental colour, and a firm conviction that brevity was the soul of wit. He leapt into fame with 'Tancredi,' which was produced in 1813 and established his reputation as a composer of opera seria. In opera buffa, a field in which his talents shone even more brilliantly, his earliest success was made with 'L'Italiana in Algeri' (1813), which was followed in 1815 by the world-famous 'Barbiere di Siviglia.' This was originally produced in Rome under the name of 'Almaviva,' and strangely enough, proved an emphatic failure. For this, however, the music was scarcely responsible. The people of Rome were at that time devotees of the music of Paisiello, and resented the impertinence of the upstart Rossini in venturing to borrow a subject which had already been treated by the older master. 'Il Barbiere' soon recovered from the shock of its unfriendly reception, and is now one of the very few of Rossini's works which have survived to the present day. The story is bright and amusing and the music brilliant and exhilarating, but it is to be feared that the real explanation of the continued success of the little opera lies in the opportunity which it offers to the prima donna of introducing her favourite *cheval de bataille* in the lesson scene. The scene of the opera is laid at Seville. Count Almaviva has fallen in love with Rosina, a fascinating damsel, whose guardian, Bartolo, keeps her under lock and key, in the hope of persuading her to marry himself. Figaro, a ubiquitous barber, who is in everybody's confidence, takes the Count under his protection, and contrives to smuggle him into the house in the disguise of a drunken soldier. Unfortunately this scheme is frustrated by the arrival of the guard, who arrests the refractory hero and carry him off to gaol. In the second act the Count succeeds in getting into the house as a music-master, but in order to gain the suspicious Bartolo's confidence he has to show him one of Rosina's letters to himself, pretending that it was given him by a mistress of Almaviva. Bartolo is delighted with the news of the Count's infidelity and hastens to tell the scandal to Rosina, whose jealousy and disappointment nearly bring Almaviva's deep-laid schemes to destruction. Happily he finds an opportunity of persuading her of his constancy while her guardian's back is turned, and induces her to elope before Bartolo has discovered the fraud practised upon him. The music is a delightful example of Rossini in his gayest and merriest mood. It sparkles with wit and fancy, and is happily free from those concessions to the vanity or idiosyncrasy of individual singers which do so much to render his music tedious to modern ears. Of Rossini's lighter works, 'Il Barbiere' is certainly the most popular, though, musically speaking, it is perhaps not superior to 'La Gazza Ladra,' which, however, is saddled with an idiotic libretto. None of his tragic operas except 'Guillaume Tell,' which belongs to a later period, have retained their hold upon the affections of the public. Nevertheless there is so much excellent music in the best of them, that it would not be strange if the course of time should bring them once more into favour, provided always that singers were forthcoming capable of singing the elaborate *fioriture* with which they abound. Perhaps the

finest of the serious operas of Rossini's Italian period is 'Semiramide' a work which is especially interesting as a proof of the strong influence which Mozart exercised upon him. The plot is a Babylonian version of the story of Agamemnon, telling of the vengeance taken by Arsaces, the son of Ninus and Semiramis, upon his guilty mother, who, with the help of her paramour Assur, had slain her husband. Much of the music is exceedingly powerful, notably that which accompanies the apparition of the ghost of Ninus (although this is evidently inspired by 'Don Giovanni'), and the passionate scene in which the conscience-stricken Assur pours forth his soul in tempest. More thoroughly Italian in type is 'Mosé in Egitto,' a curious though effective version of the Biblical story, which is still occasionally performed as an oratorio in this country, a proceeding which naturally gives little idea of its real merits. In 1833 it was actually given under the proper conditions, as a sacred opera, strengthened by a generous infusion of Handel's 'Israel in Egypt,' under the direction of Mr. Rophino Lacy. It would be an idle task to give even the names of Rossini's many operas. Suffice it to say that between 1810 and 1828 he produced upwards of forty distinct works. In 1829 came his last and greatest work, 'Guillaume Tell,' which was written for the Grand Opéra in Paris. The libretto was the work of many hands, and Rossini's own share in it was not a small one. It follows Schiller with tolerable closeness. In the first act Tell saves the life of Leuthold, who is being pursued by Gessler's soldiers; and Melchthal, the patriarch of the village, is put to death on a charge of insubordination. His son Arnold loves Matilda, the sister of Gessler, and hesitates between love and duty. Finally, however, he joins Tell, who assembles the men of the three forest cantons, and binds them with an oath to exterminate their oppressors or perish in the attempt. In the third act comes the famous archery scene. Tell refuses to bow to Gessler's hat, and is condemned to shoot the apple from his son's head. This he successfully accomplishes, but the presence of a second arrow in his quiver arouses Gessler's suspicions. Tell confesses that had he killed his son, the second arrow would have despatched the tyrant, and is at once thrown into prison. In the last act we find Arnold raising a band of followers and himself accomplishing the rescue of Tell; Gessler is slain, and Matilda is united to her lover.

'Guillaume Tell' is not only indisputably Rossini's finest work, but it also give convincing proof of the plasticity of the composer's genius. Accustomed as he had been for many years to turning out Italian operas by the score—graceful trifles enough, but too often flimsy and conventional—it says much for the character of the man that, when the occasion arrived, he could attack such a subject as that of Tell with the proper seriousness and reserve. He took what was best in the style and tradition of French opera and welded it to the thoroughly Italian fabric with which he was familiar. He put aside the excessive ornamentation with which his earlier works had been overladen, and treated the voices with a simplicity and dignity thoroughly in keeping with the subject. The choral and instrumental parts of the opera are particularly important; the latter especially have a colour and variety which may be considered to have had a large share in forming the taste for delicate orchestral effects for which modern French composers are famous. 'Guillaume Tell' was to have been the first of a series of five operas written for the Paris Opera by special arrangement with the government of Charles X. The revolution of 1830 put an end to this scheme, and a few years later, finding himself displaced by Meyerbeer in the affections of the fickle Parisian public, Rossini made up his mind to write no more for the stage. He lived for nearly forty years after the production of 'Guillaume Tell,' but preferred a life of ease and leisure to entering the lists once more as a candidate for fame. What the world lost by this decision, it is difficult to say; but if we remember the extraordinary development which took place in the style and methods of Wagner and Verdi, we cannot think without regret of the composer of 'Guillaume Tell' making up his mind while still a young man to abandon the stage for ever. Nevertheless, although much of his music soon became old-fashioned, Rossini's work was not unimportant. The invention of the cabaletta, or quick movement, following the cavatina or slow movement, must be ascribed to him, an innovation which has affected the form of opera, German and French, as well as Italian, throughout this century. Even more important was the change which he introduced into the manner of singing *fioriture* or florid music. Before his day singers had been accustomed to introduce cadenzas of their own, to a great extent when they liked. Rossini insisted upon their singing nothing but what was set down for them. Naturally he was compelled to write cadenzas for them as elaborate and effective as those

which they had been in the habit of improvising, so that much of his Italian music sounds empty and meaningless to our ears. But he introduced the thin edge of the wedge, and although even to the days of Jenny Lind singers were occasionally permitted to interpolate cadenzas of their own, the old tradition that an opera was merely an opportunity for the display of individual vanity was doomed.

The music of Donizetti (1798-1848) is now paying the price of a long career of popularity by enduring a season of neglect. His tragic operas, which were the delight of opera-goers in the fifties and sixties, sound cold and thin to modern ears. There is far more genuine life in his lighter works, many of which still delight us by their unaffected tunefulness and vivacity. Donizetti had little musical education, and his spirit rebelled so strongly against the rules of counterpoint that he preferred to go into the army rather than to devote himself to church music. His first opera, 'Enrico d i Borgogna,' was produced in 1818, and for the next five-and-twenty years he worked assiduously, producing in all no fewer than sixty-five operas.

'Lucia di Lammermoor' (1835), which was for many years one of the most popular works in the Covent Garden repertory, has now sunk to the level of a mere prima donna's opera, to be revived once or twice a year in order to give a popular singer an opportunity for vocal display. Yet there are passages in it of considerable dramatic power, and many of the melodies are fresh and expressive. The plot is founded upon 'The Bride of Lammermoor,' but it is Scott's tragic romance seen through very Italian spectacles indeed. Henry Ashton has promised the hand of his sister Lucy to Lord Arthur Bucklaw, hoping by means of this marriage to recruit the fallen fortunes of his house. Lucy loves Edgar Ravenswood, the hereditary foe of her family, and vows to be true to him while he is away on an embassy in France. During his absence Ashton contrives to intercept Ravenswood's letters to his sister, and finally produces a forged paper, which Lucy accepts as the proof of her lover's infidelity. She yields to the pressure of her brother's entreaties, and consents to marry Lord Arthur. No sooner has she set her name to the contract than the door opens and Edgar appears. Confronted with the proof of Lucy's inconstancy, he curses the house of Lammermoor and rushes away. Ashton follows him, and, after a stormy interview, challenges him to mortal combat. Meanwhile, on her bridal night Lucy has lost her reason and in her frenzy stabbed her unfortunate bridegroom. On coming once more to her senses, she puts an end to her own life; while Edgar, on hearing of the tragedy, betakes himself to the tombs of his ancestors and there commits suicide. Much of the music suffers from the conventionality to which Donizetti was a slave, notably the ridiculous mad scene, a delightfully suave melody ending with an elaborate cadenza divided between the voice and flute; but there are passages of real power, such as the fine sextet in the contract scene, and the gloomy air in which the hero calls upon the spirits of his forefathers.

Less sombre than 'Lucia,' and quite as tuneful, is 'Lucrezia Borgia,' once a prime favourite at Covent Garden, but now rarely heard. Lucrezia Borgia, the wife of Alfonso of Ferrara, has recognised Gennaro, a young Venetian, as an illegitimate son of her own, and watches over him with tender interest, though she will not disclose the real relation in which they stand to one another. Gennaro, taunted by his friends with being a victim of Lucrezia's fascinations, publicly insults her, and is thereupon condemned to death by the Duke, who is glad of the opportunity of taking vengeance upon the man whom he believes to be his wife's paramour. Gennaro is poisoned in the presence of his mother, who, however, directly the Duke's back is turned, gives him an antidote which restores him to health. In the last act Lucrezia takes comprehensive vengeance upon the friends of Gennaro, whose taunts still rankle in her bosom, by poisoning all the wine at a supper party. Unfortunately Gennaro happens to be present, and as this time he refuses to take an antidote, even though Lucrezia reveals herself as his mother, he expires in her arms.

There is little attempt at dramatic significance in the music of 'Lucrezia Borgia,' but the score bubbles over with delicious and wholly inappropriate melodies. Occasionally, as in the final scene, there is a touch of pathos, and sometimes some rather effective concerted music; but, for the most part, Donizetti was content to write his charming tunes, and to leave all expression to the singers. The orchestration of his Italian operas is primitive in the extreme, and amply justifies Wagner's taunt about the 'big guitar.' In works written for foreign theatres Donizetti took more pains, and 'La

Favorite,' produced in Paris in 1840, is in many ways the strongest of his tragic works. The story is more than usually repulsive. Fernando, a novice at the convent of St. James of Compostella, is about to take monastic vows, when he catches sight of a fair penitent, and bids farewell to the Church in order to follow her to court. She turns out to be Leonora, the mistress of the King, for whose *beaux yeux* the latter is prepared to repudiate the Queen and to brave all the terrors of Rome. Fernando finds Leonora ready to reciprocate his passion, and by her means he obtains a commission in the army. He returns covered with glory, and is rewarded by the King, who has discovered his connection with Leonora, with the hand of his cast-off mistress. After the marriage ceremony is over, Fernando hears for the first time of Leonora's past. He flies to the convent for consolation, followed by his unfortunate wife, who dies in his arms after she has obtained forgiveness. 'La Favorite' is more carefully written than was Donizetti's wont, and some of the concerted music is really dramatic. There is a tradition that the last act, which was an after-thought, was written in an incredibly short space of time, but it is significant that the beautiful romanza 'Spirto gentil,' to which the act and indeed the whole opera owes most of its popularity, was transferred from an earlier and unperformed work, 'Le Duc d'Albe.' It would be waste of time to describe the plots of any other serious works by this composer. Many of them, such as 'Betty,' 'Linda di Chamounix,' and 'Anna Bolena,' were successful when produced; but Donizetti aimed merely at satisfying the prevailing taste of the day, and when a new generation sprang up with different sympathies from that which had preceded it, the operas which had seemed the most secure of popularity were soon consigned to oblivion. It is a significant fact that Donizetti's lighter works have stood the test of time more successfully than his more serious efforts. Though the grandiose airs and sham tragedy of 'Lucia' have long since ceased to impress us, we can still take pleasure in the unaffected gaiety of 'La Fille du Régiment' and 'Don Pasquale.' These and many similar works were written *currente calamo*, and though their intrinsic musical interest is of course very slight, they are totally free from the ponderous affectations of the composer's serious operas. Here we see Donizetti at his best, because here he writes according to the natural dictates of his imagination, not in accordance with the foolish or depraved taste of fashionable connoisseurs.

The scene of 'La Fille du Régiment' is laid in the Tyrol, where Tonio, a peasant, has had the good fortune to save the life of Marie, the vivandière of a French regiment. Many years before the opening of the story, Marie had been found upon the battle-field by Sergeant Sulpice, and adopted by the regiment whose name she bears. The regiment, as a body, has the right of disposing of her hand in marriage, and when Tonio presses his claim, which is not disallowed by the heroine, it is decided that he shall be allowed to marry her if he will consent to join the regiment. Everything goes well, when a local grandee in the shape of the Marchioness Berkenfeld suddenly appears, identifies Marie as her niece by means of a letter which was found upon her by the Sergeant, and carries her off to her castle hard by, leaving the unfortunate Tonio to the bitterest reflections. In the second act Marie is at the castle of Berkenfeld though by no means at ease in her unaccustomed surroundings. Her efforts to imbibe the principles of etiquette are pleasantly interrupted by the unexpected arrival of the regiment, with Tonio now as Colonel at its head. But even his promotion will not soften the Marchioness's heart. She discloses the fact that she is in reality Marie's mother, and adjures her by her filial respect to give up the thought of her low-born lover. Marie consents in a n agony of grief. The lovers part with many tears, and at the psychological moment the Marchioness relents, and all ends happily.

Even slighter in scope is 'Don Pasquale,' a brilliant trifle, written for the Théâtre des Italiens in Paris, and there sung for the first time in 1843, by Grisi, Mario, Tamburini, and Lablache. The story turns upon a trick played by Ernesto and Norina, two young lovers, upon the uncle and guardian of the former, Don Pasquale. Ernesto will not marry to please his uncle, so the old gentleman determines to marry himself. Norina is introduced to Don Pasquale as his sister by a certain Dr. Malatesta, a friend of Ernesto, and the amorous old gentleman at once succumbs to her charms. No sooner is the marriage contract signed than Norina, acting upon her instructions, launches forth upon a career of unexampled shrewishness, extravagance, and flirtation. Her poor old lover is distracted by her wild vagaries, and in the end is only too thankful to hand her over bag and baggage to his nephew, who generously consents to relieve his uncle of his unlucky bargain.

The music of 'L'Elisir d'Amore' is not inferior to that of 'Don Pasquale' in sparkle and brilliancy, but the plot is tame and childish compared to the bustle and intrigue of the latter work. It turns upon a sham love potion sold by a travelling quack to Nemorino, a country lout who is in love with Adina, the local beauty. Adina is divided between the attractions of Nemorino and those of the Sergeant Belcore, who is quartered in the village. In order to get money to pay for the potion Nemorino joins the army, and this proof of his devotion has so convincing an effect upon the affections of Adina that she discards the soldier and bestows her hand upon Nemorino. To this silly plot is allied some of the most delightful music Donizetti ever wrote. Fresh, graceful, and occasionally tender, it forms the happiest contrast to the grandiose nonsense which the composer was in the habit of turning out to suit the vitiated taste of the day, and is a convincing proof that if he had been permitted to exercise his talent in a congenial sphere, Donizetti would be entitled to rank with the most successful followers of Cimarosa and Paisiello, instead of being degraded to the rank of a mere purveyor to the manufacturers of barrel-organs.

Different as was the talent of Bellini (1802-1835) from that of Donizetti, his fate has been the same. After holding the ear of Europe for many years, he has fallen at the present time completely into the background, and outside the frontiers of Italy his works are rarely heard. Bellini had no pretensions to dramatic power. His genius was purely elegiac in tone, and he relied entirely for the effect which he intended to produce upon the luscious beauty of his melodies, into which, it must be admitted, the great singers of his time contrived to infuse a surprising amount of dramatic force.

The story of 'La Sonnambula' is rather foolish, but it suited Bellini's idyllic style, and the work is perhaps the happiest example of his *naïf* charm. Amina, a rustic damsel, betrothed to Elvino, is a confirmed somnambulist, and her nocturnal peregrinations have given the village in which she dwells the reputation of being haunted by a spectre. One night, Amina, while walking in her sleep, enters the chamber in the inn where Rodolfo, the young lord of the village, happens to be located. There she is discovered by Lisa, the landlady, to the scandal of the neighbourhood and the shame of her lover Elvino, who casts her from him and at once makes over his affections to the landlady. Amina's sorrow and despair make her more restless than ever, and the following night she is seen walking out of a window of the mill in which she lives, and crossing the stream by a frail bridge which totters beneath her weight. Providence guards her steps, and she reaches solid earth in safety, where Elvino is waiting to receive her, fully convinced of her innocence. Bellini's music is quite the reverse of dramatic, but the melodies throughout 'La Sonnambula' are graceful and tender, and in the closing scene he rises to real pathos.

In 'Norma' Bellini had the advantage of treating a libretto of great power and beauty, the work of the poet Romani, a tragedy which, both in sentiment and diction, contrasts very strongly with the ungrammatical balderdash which composers are so often called upon to set to music. Norma, the high priestess of the Druids, forgetting her faith and the traditions of her race, has secretly wedded Pollio, a Roman general, and borne him two children. In spite of the sacrifices which she has made for his sake, he proves faithless, and seduces Adalgisa, one of the virgins of the temple, who has consented to abandon her people and her country and to fly with him to Rome. Before leaving her home, Adalgisa, ignorant of the connection between Norma and Pollio, reveals her secret to the priestess, and begs for absolution from her vows. At the news of her husband's faithlessness Norma's fury breaks forth, and her indignation is equalled by that of Adalgisa, who is furious at finding herself the mere plaything of a profligate. Pollio, maddened by passion, endeavours to tear Adalgisa from the altar of the temple, but is checked by Norma, who strikes the sacred shield and calls the Druids to arms. Pollio, now a prisoner, is brought before her for judgment, and she gives him a last choice, to renounce Adalgisa or to die. He refuses to give up his love, whereupon Norma, in a passion of self-sacrifice, tears the sacred wreath from her own brow and declares herself the guilty one. Pollio is touched by her magnanimity, and together they ascend the funeral pyre, in its flames to be cleansed from earthly sin.

It would be too much to assert that Bellini has risen to the level of this noble subject, but parts of his score have a fervour and a dignity which might scarcely have been expected from the composer of 'La Sonnambula.' We may smile now at the trio between Pollio and his two victims, in

which the extremes of fury and indignation are expressed by a lilting tune in 9-8 time, but it is impossible to deny the truth and beauty of Norma's farewell to her children, and in several other scenes there are evidences of real dramatic feeling, if not of the power to express it. It is important to remember, in discussing the works of Bellini and the other composers of his school, that in their day the art of singing was cultivated to a far higher pitch of perfection than is now the case. Consequently the composer felt that he had done his duty if, even in situations of the most tragic import, he provided his executant with a broad, even melody. Into this the consummate art of the singer could infuse every gradation of feeling. The composer presented a blank canvas, upon which the artist painted the required picture.

Unlike that of 'Norma,' the libretto of 'I Puritani,' Bellini's last opera, is adull and confused affair. The scene is laid in England, apparently at the time of the Civil War, but the history and chronology throughout are of the vaguest description. Queen Henrietta Maria is imprisoned in the fortress of Plymouth, under the guardianship of Lord Walton, the Parliamentary leader, whose daughter Elvira loves Lord Arthur Talbot, a young Cavalier, Elvira's tears and entreaties have so far softened her stern parent that Arthur is to be admitted into the castle in order that the nuptials may be celebrated. He takes advantage of the situation to effect the escape of the Queen, disguising her in Elvira's bridal veil. When his treachery is discovered Arthur is at once proscribed, and Elvira, believing him to be faithless, loses her reason. Later in the opera Arthur contrives to meet Elvira and explains his conduct satisfactorily, but their interview is cut short by a party of Puritans, who arrest him. He is condemned to be shot on the spot, but, before the sentence can be carried out, a messenger arrives with the news of the king's defeat and the pardon of Arthur. Elvira, whose insanity has throughout been of an eminently harmless description, at once recovers her reason, and everything ends happily.

'I Puritani' is in some respects Bellini's best work. Foolish as the libretto is, the bitterest opponent of Italian *cantilena* could scarcely refuse to acknowledge the pathetic beauty of many of the songs. It is a matter for regret, as well as for some surprise, that Bellini's works should now be entirely banished from the Covent Garden repertory, while so many inferior operas are still retained. In an age of fustian and balderdash, Bellini stood apart, a tender and pathetic figure, with no pretensions to science, but gifted with a command of melody as copious, unaffected, and sincere as has ever fallen to the lot of a composer for the stage.

The other Italian writers of this period may be briefly dismissed, since they did little but reproduce the salient features of their more famous contemporaries in a diluted form. Mercadante (1797-1870) lived to an advanced age, and wrote many operas, comic and serious, of which the most successful was 'Il Giuramento,' a gloomy story of love and revenge, treated with a certain power of the conventional order, and a good deal of facile melody. Pacini (1796-1867) is principally known by his 'Saffo,' an imitation of Rossini, which achieved a great success. Vaccai (1790-1848) also imitated Rossini, but his 'Giulietta e Romeo' has intrinsic merits, which are not to be despised.

After the days of Rossini, opera buffa fell upon evil days. Although the most famous musicians of the day did not disdain occasionally to follow in the footsteps of Cimarosa, for the most part the task of purveying light operas for the smaller theatres of Italy fell into the hands of second and third rate composers. Donizetti, as we have seen, enriched the repertory of opera buffa with several masterpieces of gay and brilliant vivacity, but few of the lighter works of his contemporaries deserve permanent record.

The brothers Ricci, Luigi (1805-1859) and Federico (1809-1877), wrote many operas, both singly and in collaboration, but 'Crispino e la Comare' is the only one of their works which won anything like a European reputation. The story is a happy combination of farce and *féerie*. Crispino, a half-starved cobbler, is about to throw himself into a well, when La Comare, a fairy, rises from it and bids him desist. She gives him a purse of gold, and orders him to set up as a doctor, telling him that when he goes to visit a patient he must look to see whether she is standing by the bedside. If she is not there, the sick man will recover. Crispino follows her directions, and speedily becomes famous, but success turns his head, and he is only brought back to his senses by a strange dream,



in which the fairy takes him down to a subterranean cavern where the lamp of each man's life is burning and he sees his own on the point of expiring. After this uncomfortable vision he is thankful to find himself still in the bosom of his family, and the opera ends with his vows of amendment. The music is brilliant and sparkling, and altogether the little opera is one of the best specimens of opera buffa produced in Italy after the time of Rossini. The other men who devoted themselves to opera buffa during this period may be briefly dismissed. Carlo Pedrotti (1817-1893), whose comic opera 'Tutti in Maschera,' after a brilliant career in Italy, was successfully produced in Paris, and Antonio Cagnoni (1828-1896), were perhaps the best of them. A version of the latter's 'Papa Martin' was performed in London in 1875, under the name of 'The Porter of Havre.'

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# CHAPTER VIII

## MEYERBEER AND FRENCH OPERA

### HÉROLD—MEYERBEER—BERLIOZ—HALÉVY—AUBER

The romantic movement was essentially German in its origin, but its influence was not bounded by the Rhine. As early as 1824 Weber's 'Freischütz' was performed in Paris, followed a few years later by 'Oberon' and 'Euryanthe.' French musicians, always susceptible to external influences, could not but acknowledge the fascination of the romantic school, and the works of Hérold (1791-1833) show how powerfully the new leaven had acted. But Weber was not the only foreigner at this time who helped to shape the destiny of French music. The spell of Rossini was too potent for the plastic Gauls to resist, and to his influence may be traced the most salient features of the school of opéra comique which is best represented by Auber. Hérold, though divided between the camps of Germany and Italy, had individuality enough to write music which was independent of either. Yet it is significant that his last two works—the only two, in fact, which have survived—represent with singular completeness the two influences which affected French music most potently during his day. 'Zampa' has been called a French 'Don Giovanni,' but the music owes far more to Weber than to Mozart, while the fantastic and absurd incidents of the plot have little of the supernatural terror of Mozart's opera. Zampa is a famous pirate, who, after having dissipated his fortune and made Italy, generally speaking, too hot to hold him, has taken to the high seas in self-defence. In his early days he had seduced a girl named Alice Manfredi, who after his desertion found a home in the house of a Sicilian merchant named Lugano. There she died, and there Lugano caused a statue to be set up in her honour. When the story of the opera begins, Lugano is a prisoner in the hands of the redoubtable Zampa. The pirate himself comes to Sicily to obtain his prisoner's ransom, bringing directions to Lugano's daughter Camilla to pay him whatever he may ask. Zampa at once falls a victim to the *beaux yeux* of Camilla, and demands her hand as the price of her father's safety. Camilla loves Alfonso, a Sicilian officer, but is prepared to sacrifice herself to save her father. At the marriage feast, Zampa, recognising the statue of the betrayed Alice, jokingly puts his ring upon her finger, which immediately closes upon it. The opera ends by the statue claiming Zampa as her own, snatching him from the arms of Camilla, and descending with him into the abyss.

It would be in vain to look in Hérold's score for an echo of the passion and variety of Mozart, but much of the music of 'Zampa' is picturesque and effective. Hérold's tunes sound very conventional after Weber, but there is a good deal of skill in the way they are presented. His orchestration is of course closely modelled on that of his German prototype, and if it is impossible to say much for his originality, we can at any rate admire his taste in choosing a model.

'Le Pré aux Clercs' is more popular at the present moment than 'Zampa,' though it is far inferior in musical interest. If 'Zampa' showed the influence of Weber, 'Le Pré aux Clercs' is redolent of Rossini. The overture, with its hollow ring of gaiety, strikes the note of Italianism which echoes throughout the opera. The plot is full of intrigues and conspiracies, and is decidedly confusing. Mergy, a young Bernese gentleman, aspires to the hand of Isabelle, who is one of the Queen of Navarre's maids of honour. The Queen favours their love, but the King wishes Isabelle to marry Comminges, a favourite of his own. The young couple gain their point, and are married secretly in the chapel of the Pré aux Clercs, but only at the expense of as much plotting and as many disguises as would furnish the stock-in-trade of half-a-dozen detective romances.

French music, as has often been pointed out, owes much to foreign influence, but very few of the strangers to whom the doors of Parisian opera-houses were opened left a deeper impression upon the music of their adopted country than Meyerbeer (1791-1864). Giacomo Meyerbeer, to give him the name by which he is now best known, underwent the same influence as Hérold. As a youth he was intimate with Weber, and his first visit to Italy introduced him to Rossini, whose brilliant style

he imitated successfully in a series of Italian works which are now completely forgotten. From Italy Meyerbeer came to Paris, and there identified himself with the French school so fully that he is now regarded with complete propriety as a French composer pure and simple. Meyerbeer's music is thoroughly eclectic in type. He was a careful student of contemporary music, and the various phases through which he passed during the different stages of his career left their impress upon his style. It says much for the power of his individuality that he was able to weld such different elements into something approaching an harmonious whole. Had he done more than he did, he would have been a genius; as it is, he remains a man of exceptional talent, whose influence on the history of modern music is still important, though his own compositions are now slightly superannuated. 'Robert le Diable,' the first work of his third or French period, was produced in 1831. The libretto, which, like those of all the composer's French operas, was by Eugène Scribe, is a strange tissue of absurdities, though from the merely scenic point of view it may be thought fairly effective. Robert, Duke of Normandy, the son of the Duchess Bertha by a fiend who donned the shape of man to prosecute his amour, arrives in Sicily to compete for the hand of the Princess Isabella, which is to be awarded as the prize at a magnificent tournament. Robert's daredevil gallantry and extravagance soon earn him the sobriquet of 'Le Diable,' and he puts the coping-stone to his folly by gambling away all his possessions at a single sitting, even to his horse and the armour on his back. Robert has an *âme damnée* in the shape of a knight named Bertram, to whose malign influence most of his crimes and follies are due. Bertram is in reality his demon-father, whose every effort is directed to making a thorough-paced villain of his son, so that he may have the pleasure of enjoying his society for all eternity. In strong contrast to the fiendish malevolence of Bertram stands the gentle figure of Alice, Robert's foster-sister, who has followed him from Normandy with a message from his dead mother. Isabella supplies Robert with a fresh horse and arms; nevertheless he is beguiled away from Palermo by some trickery of Bertram's, and fails to put in an appearance at the tournament. The only means, therefore, left to him of obtaining the hand of Isabella is to visit the tomb of his mother, and there to pluck a magic branch of cypress, which will enable him to defeat his rivals. The cypress grows in a deserted convent haunted by the spectres of profligate nuns, and there, amidst infernal orgies, Robert plucks the branch of power. By its aid he sends the guards of the Princess into a deep sleep, and is only prevented by her passionate entreaties from carrying her off by force. Yielding to her prayers, he breaks the branch, and his magic power at once deserts him. He seeks sanctuary from his enemies in the cathedral, and there the last and fiercest strife for the possession of his soul is waged between the powers of good and evil. On the one hand is Bertram, whose term of power on earth expires at midnight. He has now discovered himself as Robert's father, and produces an infernal compact of union which he entreats his son to sign. On the other is Alice, pleading and affectionate, bearing the last words of Robert's dead mother, warning him against the fiend who had seduced her. While Robert is hesitating between the two, midnight strikes, and Bertram sinks with thunder into the pit. The scene changes, and a glimpse is given of the interior of the cathedral, where the marriage of Robert and Isabella is being celebrated.

'Robert le Diable' was an immense success when first produced. The glitter and tinsel of the story suited Meyerbeer's showy style, and besides, even when the merely trivial and conventional had been put aside, there remains a fair proportion of the score which has claims to dramatic power. The triumph of 'Robert' militated against the success of 'Les Huguenots' (1836), which was at first rather coldly received. Before long, however, it rivalled the earlier work in popularity, and is now generally looked upon as Meyerbeer's masterpiece. The libretto certainly compares favourably with the fatuities of 'Robert le Diable.'

Marguerite de Valois, the beautiful Queen of Navarre, who is anxious to reconcile the bitterly hostile parties of Catholics and Huguenots, persuades the Comte de Saint Bris, a prominent Catholic, to allow his daughter Valentine to marry Raoul de Nangis, a young Huguenot noble. Valentine is already betrothed to the gallant and amorous Comte de Nevers, but she pays him a nocturnal visit in his own palace, and induces him to release her from her engagement. During her interview with Nevers she is perceived by Raoul, and recognised as a lady whom he lately rescued from insult and has loved passionately ever since. In his eyes there is only one possible

construction to be put upon her presence in Nevers' palace, and he hastens to dismiss her from his mind. Immediately upon his decision comes a message from the Queen bidding him hasten to her palace in Touraine upon important affairs of state. When he arrives she unfolds her plan, and he, knowing Valentine only by sight, not by name, gladly consents. When, in the presence of the assembled nobles, he recognises in his destined bride the presumed mistress of Nevers, he casts her from him, and vows to prefer death to such intolerable disgrace.

The scene of the next act is in the Pré aux Clercs, in the outskirts of Paris. Valentine, who is to be married that night to Nevers, obtains leave to pass some hours in prayer in a chapel. While she is there she overhears the details of a plot devised by Saint Bris for the assassination of Raoul, in order to avenge the affront put upon himself and his daughter. Valentine contrives to warn Marcel, Raoul's old servant, of this, and he assembles his Huguenot comrades hard by, who rush in at the first clash of steel and join the combat. The fight is interrupted by the entrance of the Queen. When she finds out who are the principal combatants, she reproves them sharply and tells Raoul the real story of Valentine's visit to Nevers. The act ends with the marriage festivities, while Raoul is torn by an agony of love and remorse.

In the next act Raoul contrives to gain admittance to Nevers' house, and there has an interview with Valentine. They are interrupted by the entrance of Saint Bris and his followers, whereupon Valentine conceals Raoul behind the arras. From his place of concealment he hears Saint Bris unfold the plan of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, which is to be carried out that night. The conspirators swear a solemn oath to exterminate the Huguenots, and their daggers are consecrated by attendant priests. Nevers alone refuses to take part in the butchery. When they all have left, Raoul comes out of his hiding-place, and in spite of the prayers and protestations of Valentine, leaps from the window at the sound of the fatal tocsin, and hastens to join his friends. In the last act, which is rarely performed in England, Raoul first warns Henry of Navarre and the Huguenot nobles, assembled at the Hôtel de Sens, of the massacre, and then joins the *mélée* in the streets. Valentine has followed him, and after vainly endeavouring to make him don the white scarf which is worn that night by all Catholics, she throws in her lot with his, and dies in his arms, after they have been solemnly joined in wedlock by the wounded and dying Marcel.

'Les Huguenots' shows Meyerbeer at his best. Even Wagner, his bitterest enemy, admitted the dramatic power of the great duet in the fourth act, and several other scenes are scarcely inferior to it in sustained inspiration. The opera is marred as a whole by Meyerbeer's invincible self-consciousness. He seldom had the courage to give his genius full play. He never lost sight of his audience, and wrote what he thought would be effective rather than what he knew was right. Thus his finest moments are marred by lapses from sincerity into the commonplace conventionality of the day. Yet the dignity and power of 'Les Huguenots' are undeniable, and it is unfortunate that its excessive length should prevent it from ever being heard in its entirety.

In 'Le Prophète' Meyerbeer chose a subject which, if less rich in dramatic possibility than that of 'Les Huguenots,' has a far deeper psychological interest. Unfortunately, Scribe, with all his cleverness, was quite the worst man in the world to deal with the story of John of Leyden. In the libretto which he constructed for Meyerbeer's benefit the psychological interest is conspicuous only by its absence, and the character of the young leader of the Anabaptists is degraded to the level of the merest puppet. John, an innkeeper of Leyden, loves Bertha, a village maiden who dwells near Dordrecht. Unfortunately, her liege lord, the Count of Oberthal, has designs upon the girl himself, and refuses his consent to the marriage. Bertha escapes from his clutches and flies to the protection of her lover, but Oberthal secures the person of Fidès, John's old mother, and by threats of putting her to death, compels him to give up Bertha. Wild with rage against the vice and lawlessness of the nobles, John joins the ranks of the Anabaptists, a revolutionary sect pledged to the destruction of the powers that be. Their leaders recognise him as a prophet promised by Heaven, and he is installed as their chief. The Anabaptists lay siege to Munster, which falls into their hands, and in the cathedral John is solemnly proclaimed the Son of God. During the ceremony he is recognised by Fidès, who, believing him to have been slain by the false prophet, has followed the army to Munster in hopes of revenge. She rushes forward to claim her son, but

John pretends not to know her. To admit an earthly relationship would be to prejudice his position with the populace, and he compels her to confess that she is mistaken. The coronation ends with John's triumph, while the hapless Fidès is carried off to be immured in a dungeon. John visits her in her cell, and obtains her pardon by promising to renounce his deceitful splendour and to fly with her. Later he discovers that a plot against himself has been hatched by some of the Anabaptist leaders, and he destroys himself and them by blowing up the palace of Munster. Meyerbeer's music, fine as much of it is, suffers chiefly from the character of the libretto. The latter is merely a string of conventionally effective scenes, and the music could hardly fail to be disjointed and scrappy. Meyerbeer had little or no feeling for characterisation, so that the opportunities for really dramatic effect which lay in the character of John of Leyden have been almost entirely neglected. Once only, in the famous cantique 'Roi du Ciel,' did the composer catch an echo of the prophetic rapture which animated the youthful enthusiast. Meyerbeer's besetting sin, his constant search for the merely effective, is even more pronounced in 'Le Prophète' than in 'Les Huguenots.' The coronation scene has nothing of the large simplicity necessary for the proper manipulation of a mass of sound. The canvas is crowded with insignificant and confusing detail, and the general effect is finicking and invertebrate rather than solid and dignified.

Meyerbeer was constantly at work upon his last opera, 'L'Africaine,' from 1838 until 1864, and his death found him still engaged in retouching the score. It was produced in 1865. With a musician of Meyerbeer's known eclecticism, it might be supposed that a work of which the composition extended over so long a period would exhibit the strangest conglomeration of styles and influences. Curiously enough, 'L'Africaine' is the most consistent of Meyerbeer's works. This is probably due to the fact that in it the personal element is throughout outweighed by the picturesque, and the exotic fascination of the story goes far to cover its defects.

Vasco da Gama, the famous discoverer, is the betrothed lover of a maiden named Inez, the daughter of Don Diego, a Portuguese grandee. When the opera opens he is still at sea, and has not been heard of for years. Don Pedro, the President of the Council, takes advantage of his absence to press his own suit for the hand of Inez, and obtains the King's sanction to his marriage on the ground that Vasco must have been lost at sea. At this moment the long-lost hero returns, accompanied by two swarthy slaves, Selika and Nelusko, whom he has brought home from a distant isle in the Indian Ocean. He recounts the wonders of the place, and entreats the government to send out a pioneer expedition to win an empire across the sea. His suggestions are rejected, and he himself, through the machinations of Don Pedro, is cast into prison. There he is tended by Selika, who loves her gentle captor passionately, and has need of all her regal authority—for in the distant island she was a queen—to prevent the jealous Nelusko from slaying him in his sleep. Inez now comes to the prison to announce to Vasco that she has purchased his liberty at the price of giving her hand to Don Pedro. In the next act, Don Pedro, who has stolen a march on Vasco, is on his way to the African island, taking with him Inez and Selika. The steering of the vessel is entrusted to Nelusko. Vasco da Gama, who has fitted out a vessel at his own expense, overtakes Don Pedro in mid-ocean, and generously warns his rival of the treachery of Nelusko, who is steering the vessel upon the rocks of his native shore. Don Pedro's only reply is to order Vasco to be tied to the mast and shot, but before the sentence can be carried out the vessel strikes upon the rocks, and the aborigines swarm over the sides. Selika, once more a queen, saves the lives of Vasco and Inez from the angry natives. In the next act the nuptials of Selika and Vasco are on the point of being celebrated with great pomp, when the hero, who has throughout the opera wavered between the two women who love him, finally makes up his mind in favour of Inez. Selika thereupon magnanimously despatches them home in Vasco's ship, and poisons herself with the fragrance of the deadly manchineel tree. The characters of 'L'Africaine,' with the possible exception of Selika and Nelusko, are the merest shadows, but the music, though less popular as a rule than that of 'Les Huguenots,' or even 'Le Prophète,' is undoubtedly Meyerbeer's finest effort. In his old age Meyerbeer seems to have looked back to the days of his Italian period, and thus, though occasionally conventional in form, the melodies of 'L'Africaine' have a dignity and serenity which are rarely present in the scores of his French period. There is, too, a laudable absence of that ceaseless striving after effect which mars so much of Meyerbeer's best work.

Besides the great works already discussed, Meyerbeer wrote two works for the Opéra Comique, 'L'Étoile du Nord' and 'Le Pardon de Ploërmel.' Meyerbeer was far too clever a man to undertake anything he could not carry through successfully, and in these operas he caught the trick of French opéra comique very happily.

'L'Étoile du Nord' deals with the fortunes of Peter the Great, who, when the opera opens, is working as a shipwright at a dockyard in Finland. He wins the heart of Catherine, a Cossack maiden, who has taken up her quarters there as a kind of vivandière. Catherine is a girl of remarkable spirit, and after repulsing an incursion of Calmuck Tartars single-handed, goes off to the wars in the disguise of a recruit, in order to enable her brother to stay at home and marry Prascovia, the daughter of the innkeeper. The next act takes place in the Russian camp. Catherine, whose soldiering has turned out a great success, is told off to act as sentry outside the tent occupied by two distinguished officers who have just arrived. To her amazement she recognises them as Peter and his friend Danilowitz, a former pastry-cook, now raised by the Czar to the rank of General. Catherine's surprise and pleasure turn to indignation when she sees her lover consoling himself for her absence with the charms of a couple of pretty vivandières, and when her senior officer reprimands her for eavesdropping, she bestows upon him a sound box on the ears. For this misdemeanour she is condemned to be shot, but she contrives to make her escape, first sending a letter to Peter blaming him for his inconstancy, and putting in his hand the details of a conspiracy against his person which she has been fortunate enough to discover. Peter's anguish at the loss of his loved one is accentuated by the nobility of her conduct. At first it is supposed that Catherine is dead, but by the exertions of Danilowitz she is at length discovered, though in a lamentable plight, for her troubles have cost her her reason. She is restored to sanity by the simple method of reconstructing the scene of the Finnish dockyard in which she first made Peter's acquaintance, and peopling it with the familiar forms of the workmen. Among the latter are Peter and Danilowitz, in their old dresses of labourer and pastry-cook, and, to crown all, two flutes are produced upon which Peter and her brother play a tune known to her from childhood. The last charm proves effectual, and all ends happily.

The lighter parts of 'L'Étoile du Nord' are delightfully arch and vivacious, and much of the concerted music is gay and brilliant. The weak point of the opera is to be found in the tendency from which Meyerbeer was never safe, to drop into mere pretentiousness when he meant to be most impressive. In some of the choruses in the camp scene there is a great pretence at elaboration, with very scanty results, and the closing scena, which is foolish and wearisome, is an unfortunate concession to the vanity of the prima donna. But on the whole 'L'Étoile du Nord' is one of Meyerbeer's most attractive works, besides being an extraordinary example of his inexhaustible versatility.

'Le Pardon de Ploërmel,' known in Italy and England as 'Dinorah,' shows Meyerbeer in a pastoral and idyllic vein. The story is extremely silly in itself, and most of the incidents take place before the curtain rises. The overture is a long piece of programme music, which is supposed to depict the bridal procession of Hoel and Dinorah, two Breton peasants, to the church where they are to be married. Suddenly a thunderstorm breaks over their heads and disperses the procession, while a flash of lightning reduces Dinorah's homestead to ashes. Hoel, in despair at the ruin of his hopes, betakes himself to the village sorcerer, who promises to tell him the secret of the hidden treasure of the local gnomes or Korriganes if he will undergo a year of trial in a remote part of the country. On hearing that Hoel has abandoned her Dinorah becomes insane, and spends her time in roving through the woods with her pet goat in search of her lover. The overture is a picturesque piece of writing enough, though much of it would be entirely meaningless without its programme. When the opera opens, Hoel has returned from his probation in possession of the important secret. His first care is to find some one to do the dirty work of finding the treasure, for the oracle has declared that the first man who shall lay hands upon it will die. His choice falls upon Corentin, a country lout, whom he persuades to accompany him to the gorge where the treasure lies hidden. Corentin is not so stupid as he seems, and, suspecting something underhand, he persuades the mad Dinorah to go down into the ravine in his place. Dinorah consents, but while she is crossing a

rustic bridge, preparatory to the descent, it is struck by lightning, and she tumbles into the abyss. She is saved by Hoel in some inexplicable way, and, still more inexplicably, regains her reason. The music is bright and tuneful, and the reaper's and hunter's songs (which are introduced for no apparent reason) are delightful; but the libretto is so impossibly foolish that the opera has fallen into disrepute, although the brilliant music of the heroine should make it a favourite rôle with competent singers.

Meyerbeer was extravagantly praised during his lifetime; he is now as bitterly decried. The truth seems to lie, as usual, between the two extremes. He was an unusually clever man, with a strong instinct for the theatre. He took immense pains with his operas, often rewriting the entire score; but his efforts were directed less towards ideal perfection than to what would be most effective, so that there is a hollowness and a superficiality about his best work which we cannot ignore, even while we admit the ingenuity of the means employed. His influence upon modern opera has been extensive. He was the real founder of the school of melodramatic opera which is now so popular. Violent contrasts with him do duty for the subtle characterisation of the older masters. His heroes rant and storm, and his heroines shriek and rave, but of real feeling, and even of real expression, there is little in his scores.

The career of Hector Berlioz (1803-1869) was in striking contrast to that Meyerbeer. While Meyerbeer was earning the plaudits of crowded theatres throughout the length and breadth of Europe, Berlioz sat alone, brooding over the vast conceptions to which it taxed even his gigantic genius to give musical shape. Even now the balance has scarcely been restored. Though Meyerbeer's popularity is on the wane, the operas of Berlioz are still known for the most part only to students. Before the Berlioz cycle at Carlsruhe in 1893, 'La Prise de Troie' had never been performed on any stage, and though the French master's symphonic works now enjoy considerable popularity, his dramatic works are still looked at askance by managers. There is a reason for this other than the hardness of our hearts. Berlioz was essentially a symphonic writer. He had little patience with the conventions of the stage, and his attempts to blend the dramatic and symphonic elements, as in 'Les Troyens,' can scarcely be termed a success. Yet much may be pardoned for the sake of the noble music which lies enshrined in his works. 'Benvenuto Cellini' and 'Béatrice et Bénédict,' which were thought too advanced for the taste of their day, are now perhaps a trifle old-fashioned for our times. The first is a picturesque story of Rome in Carnival time. The interest centres in the casting of the sculptor's mighty Perseus, which wins him the hand of the fair Teresa. The Carnival scenes are gay and brilliant, but the form of the work belongs to a bygone age, and it is scarcely possible that a revival of it would meet with wide acceptance. 'Béatrice et Bénédict' is a graceful setting of Shakespeare's 'Much Ado about Nothing.' It is a work of the utmost delicacy and refinement. Though humour is not absent from the score, the prevailing impression is one of romantic charm, passing even to melancholy. Very different is the double drama 'Les Troyens.' Here Berlioz drew his inspiration directly from Gluck, and the result is a work of large simplicity and austere grandeur, which it is not too much to hope will some day take its place in the world's repertory side by side with the masterpieces of Wagner. The first part, 'La Prise de Troie,' describes the manner in which the city of Priam fell into the hands of the Greeks. The drama is dominated by the form of the sad virgin Cassandra. In vain she warns her people of their doom. They persist in dragging up the wooden horse from the sea-beach, where it was left by the Greeks. The climax of the last act is terrific. Æneas, warned by the ghost of Hector of the approaching doom of Troy, escapes; but the rest of the Trojans fall victims to the swords of the Greeks in a scene of indescribable carnage and terror. Cassandra and the Trojan women, driven to take shelter in the temple of Cybele, slay themselves rather than fall into the hands of their captors. 'La Prise de Troie' is perhaps epic rather than dramatic, but as a whole it leaves an impression of severe and spacious grandeur, which can only be paralleled in the finest inspirations of Gluck. In the second division of the work, 'Les Troyens à Carthage,' human interest is paramount. Berlioz was an enthusiastic student of Virgil, and he follows the tragic tale of the Æneid closely. The appearance of Æneas at Carthage, the love of Dido, the summons of Mercury, Æneas' departure and the passion and death of Dido, are depicted in a series of scenes of such picturesqueness and power, such languor and pathos, as surely cannot be matched outside the

finest pages of Wagner. A time will certainly come when this great work, informed throughout with a passionate yearning for the loftiest ideal of art, will receive the recognition which is its due. Of late indeed there have been signs of a revival of interest in Berlioz's mighty drama, and the recent performances of 'Les Troyens' in Paris and Brussels have opened the eyes of many musicians to its manifold beauties. Some years ago the experiment was made of adapting Berlioz's cantata, 'La Damnation de Faust,' for stage purposes. The work is of course hopelessly undramatic, but the beauty of the music and the opportunities that it affords for elaborate spectacular effects have combined to win the work a certain measure of success, especially in Italy where Gounod's 'Faust' has never won the popularity that it enjoys north of the Alps. 'La Damnation de Faust' is hardly more than a string of incidents, with only the most shadowy semblance of connection, but several of the scenes are effective enough on the stage, notably that in Faust's study with the march of Hungarian warriors in the distance, the exquisite dance of sylphs and the ride to the abyss. Nevertheless, when the success of curiosity is over, the work is hardly likely to retain its place in the repertory.

Unperformed as he was, Berlioz of course could not be expected to found a school; but Meyerbeer's success soon raised him up a host of imitators. Halévy (1799-1862) drew his inspiration in part from Hérold and Weber; but 'La Juive,' the work by which he is best known, owes much to Meyerbeer, whose 'Robert le Diable' had taken the world of music in Paris by storm a few years before the production of Halévy's work. In turn Halévy reacted upon Meyerbeer. Many passages in 'Les Huguenots' reflect the sober dignity of 'La Juive'; indeed, it is too often forgotten that the production of Halévy's opera preceded its more famous contemporary by a full year.

The scene of 'La Juive' is laid in Constance, in the fifteenth century. Leopold, a Prince of the Empire, in the disguise of a young Israelite, has won the heart of Rachel, the daughter of the rich Jew Eleazar. When the latter discovers the true nationality of his prospective son-in-law he forbids him his house, but Rachel consents, like another Jessica, to fly with her lover. Later she discovers that Leopold is a Prince, and betrothed to the Princess Eudoxia. Her jealousy breaks forth, and she accuses him of having seduced her—a crime which in those days was punishable by death. Rachel, Leopold, and Eleazar are all thrown into prison. There Rachel relents, and retracts her accusation. Leopold is accordingly released, but the Jew and his daughter are condemned to be immersed in a cauldron of boiling oil. There is a rather meaningless underplot which results in a confession made by Eleazar on the scaffold, that Rachel is not a Jewess at all, but the daughter of a Cardinal who has taken a friendly interest in her fortunes throughout the drama.

Halévy's music is characterised by dignity and sobriety, but it rarely rises to passion. He represents to a certain extent a reaction towards the pre-Rossinian school of opera, but, to be frank, most of 'La Juive' is exceedingly long-winded and dull. Besides his serious operas, Halévy wrote works of a lighter cast, which enjoyed popularity in their time. But the prince of opéra comique at this time was Auber (1782-1871). Auber began his career as a musician comparatively late in life, but *en revanche* age seemed powerless to check his unflagging industry. His last work, 'Le Rêve d'Amour,' was produced in the composer's eighty-eighth year. Auber is a superficial Rossini. He borrowed from the Italian master his wit and gaiety; he could not catch an echo of his tenderness and passion. Auber has never been so popular in England as abroad, and the only two works of his which are now performed in this country—'Fra Diavolo' and 'Masaniello'—represent him, curiously enough, at his best and worst respectively. The scene of 'Fra Diavolo' is laid at a village inn in Italy. Lord and Lady Rocburg, the conventional travelling English couple, arrive in great perturbation, been stopped by brigands and plundered of some of their property. At the inn they fall in with a distinguished personage calling himself the Marquis di San Marco, who is none other than the famous brigand chief Fra Diavolo. He makes violent love to the silly Englishwoman, and soon obtains her confidence. Meanwhile Lorenzo, the captain of a body of carabinieri, who loves the innkeeper's daughter Zerlina, has hurried off after the brigands. He comes up with them and kills twenty, besides getting back Lady Rocburg's stolen jewels. Fra Diavolo is furious at the loss of his comrades, and vows vengeance on Lorenzo. That night he conceals himself in Zerlina's room, and, when all is still, admits two of his followers into the house. Their nocturnal schemes are



frustrated by the return of Lorenzo and his soldiers, who have been out in search of the brigand chief. Fra Diavolo is discovered, but pretends that Zerlina has given him an assignation. Lorenzo is furious at this accusation, and challenges the brigand to a duel. Before this comes off, however, Fra Diavolo's identity is discovered, and he is captured by Lorenzo and his band. 'Fra Diavolo' shows Auber in his happiest vein. The music is gay and tuneful, without dropping into commonplace; the rhythms are brilliant and varied, and the orchestration neat and appropriate.

'La Muette de Portici,' which is known in the Italian version as 'Masaniello,' was written for the Grand Opéra. Here Auber vainly endeavoured to suit his style to its more august surroundings. The result is entirely unsatisfactory; the more serious parts of the work are pretentious and dull, and the pretty little tunes, which the composer could not keep out of his head, sound absurdly out of place in a serious drama. Fenella, the dumb girl of Portici, has been seduced by Alfonso, the son of the Spanish Viceroy of Naples. She escapes from the confinement to which she had been subjected, and denounces him on the day of his marriage to the Spanish princess Elvira. Masaniello, her brother, maddened by her wrongs, stirs up a revolt among the people, and overturns the Spanish rule. He contrives to save the lives of Elvira and Alfonso, but this generous act costs him his life, and in despair Fenella leaps into the stream of boiling lava from an eruption of Vesuvius. The part of Fenella gives an opportunity of distinction to a clever pantomimist, and has been associated with the names of many famous dancers; but the music of the opera throughout is one of the least favourable examples of Auber's skill. Auber had many imitators, among whom perhaps the most successful was Adolphe Adam (1803-1856), whose 'Châlet' and 'Postillon de Longjumeau' are still occasionally performed. They reproduce the style of Auber with tolerable fidelity, but have no value as original work. The only other composer of this period who deserves to be mentioned is Félicien David (1810-1876). His 'Lalla Rookh,' a setting of Moore's story, though vastly inferior to his symphonic poem 'Le Désert,' is a work of distinction and charm. To David belongs the credit of opening the eyes of musicians to the possibilities of Oriental colour. Operas upon Eastern subjects have never been very popular in England, but in France many of them have been successful. 'Le Désert' founded the school, of which 'Les Pêcheurs de Perles,' 'Djamileh,' 'Le Roi de Lahore,' and 'Lakmé' are well-known representatives. The career of the other musicians—many in number—of this facile and thoughtless epoch may be summed up in a few words. They were one and all imitators; Clapisson (1808-1866), Grisar (1808-1869), and Maillart (1817-1871), clung to the skirts of Auber; Niedermeyer (1802-1861), threw in his lot with Halévy. So far as they succeeded in reproducing the external and superficial features of the music of their prototypes, they enjoyed a brief day of popularity. But with the first change of public taste they lapsed into oblivion, and their works nowadays sound far more old-fashioned than those of the generation which preceded them.

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# CHAPTER IX

## WAGNER'S EARLY WORKS

Richard Wagner (1813-1883) is by far the most important figure in the history of modern opera. With regard to the intrinsic beauty of his works, and the artistic value of the theories upon which they are constructed, there have been, and still are, two opinions; but his most bigoted opponents can scarcely refuse to acknowledge the extent of the influence which he has had upon contemporary and subsequent music—an influence, in fact, which places him by the side of Monteverde and Gluck among the great revolutionists of musical history. As in their case, the importance of his work rests upon the fact that, although to a certain extent an assimilation and development of the methods of his predecessors, it embodied a deliberate revolt against existing musical conditions.

From one point of view Wagner's revolt is even more important than that of either of his forerunners, for they were men who, having failed to win success under the existing conditions of music, revolted—so to speak—in self-preservation, while he was an accomplished musician, and the author of a successful work written in strict accordance with the canons of art which then obtained. Had Wagner pleased, there was nothing to hinder his writing a succession of 'Rienzi's,' and ending his days, like Spontini, rich and ennobled. To his eternal honour he rejected the prospect, and chose the strait and narrow way which led, through poverty and disgrace, to immortality. In spite of the acknowledged success of 'Rienzi,' Wagner's enemies were never tired of repeating that, like Monteverde, he had invented a new system because he could not manipulate the old. It seems hardly possible to us that musicians could ever have been found to deny that the composer of 'Die Meistersinger' was a consummate master of counterpoint. Fortunately the discovery of his Symphony in C finally put an end to all doubts relative to the thoroughness of Wagner's musical education. In this work, which was written at the age of eighteen, the composer showed a mastery of the symphonic form which many of his detractors might have envied. The fact is, that Wagner was a man of a singularly flexible habit of mind. He was a careful student of both ancient and modern music, and a study of his works shows us that, so far from despising what had been done by his predecessors, he greedily assimilated all that was best in their productions, only rejecting the narrow conventions in which so many of them had contentedly acquiesced. His music is the logical development of that of Gluck and Weber, purified by a closer study of the principles of declamation, and enriched by a command of orchestral resource of which they had never dreamed.

Wagner's first opera, 'Die Feen,' was written in 1833, when the composer was twenty years old. Wagner always wrote his own libretti, even in those days. The story of 'Die Feen' was taken from one of Gozzi's fairy-tales, 'La Donna Serpente.' Wagner himself, in his 'Communication to my Friends,' written in 1851, has given us a *résumé* of the plot: 'A fairy, who renounces immortality for the sake of a human lover, can only become a mortal through the fulfilment of certain hard conditions, the non-compliance wherewith on the part of her earthly swain threatens her with the direst penalties; her lover fails in the test, which consists in this, that, however evil and repulsive she may appear to him (in the metamorphosis which she has to undergo), he shall not reject her in his unbelief. In Gozzi's tale the fairy is changed into a snake; the remorseful lover frees her from the spell by kissing the snake, and thus wins her for his wife. I altered this *dénouement* by changing the fairy into a stone, and then releasing her from the spell by her lover's passionate song; while the lover, instead of being allowed to carry off his bride into his own country, is himself admitted by the fairy king to the immortal bliss of fairyland, together with his fairy wife.'

When Wagner wrote 'Die Feen' he was under the spell of Weber, whose influence is perceptible in every page of the score. Marschner, too, whose 'Vampyr' and 'Templer und Jüdin' had been recently produced at Leipzig, which was then Wagner's headquarters, also appealed very strongly

to the young musician's plastic temperament. 'Die Feen' consequently has little claim to originality, but the work is nevertheless interesting to those who desire to trace the master's development *ab ovo*. Both in the melodies and rhythms employed it is possible to trace the germs of what afterwards became strongly marked characteristics. Wagner himself never saw 'Die Feen' performed. In 1833 he could not persuade any German manager to produce it, and, in the changes which soon came over his musical sympathies, 'Die Feen' was laid upon the shelf and probably forgotten. It was not until 1888, five years after the composer's death, that the general enthusiasm for everything connected with Wagner induced the authorities at Munich to produce it. Since then it has been performed with comparative frequency, and formed a part of the cycles of Wagner's works which were given in 1894 and 1895. Wagner's next work was of a very different nature. 'Das Liebesverbot' was a frank imitation of the Italian school. He himself confesses that 'if any one should compare this score with that of "Die Feen" he would find it difficult to understand how such a complete change in my tendencies could have been brought about in so short a time.' The incident which turned his thoughts into this new channel was a performance of Bellini's 'Capuletti e Montecchi,' in which Madame Schroeder-Devrient sang the part of Romeo. This remarkable woman exercised in those days an almost hypnotic influence upon Wagner, and the beauty and force of this particular impersonation impressed him so vividly that he relinquished his admiration of Weber and the Teutonic school and plunged headlong into the meretricious sensuousness of Italy. The libretto of 'Das Liebesverbot' is founded upon Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure,' It was performed for the first and only time at Magdeburg in 1836, and failed completely; but it is only just to say that its failure seems to have been due more to insufficient rehearsal than to the weakness of the score. After the success of 'Die Feen' at Munich, it naturally occurred to the authorities there to revive Wagner's one other juvenile opera. The score of 'Das Liebesverbot' was accordingly unearthed, and the parts were allotted. The first rehearsal, however, decided its fate. The opera was so ludicrous and unblushing an imitation of Donizetti and Bellini, that the artists could scarcely sing for laughter. Herr Vogl, the eminent tenor, and one or two others were still in favour of giving it as a curiosity, but in the end it was thought better to drop it altogether, less on account of the music than because of the licentious character of the libretto.

'Rienzi,' the next in order of Wagner's operas, was written on the lines of French opera. Wagner hoped to see it performed in Paris, and throughout the score he kept the methods of Meyerbeer and Spontini consistently in his mind's eye. There is very little attempt at characterisation, but the opportunities for spectacular display are many and various. In later years Meyerbeer paid Wagner the compliment of saying that the libretto of 'Rienzi' was the best he had ever read. 'Rienzi' was produced at Dresden in 1842.

The opera opens at night. The scene is laid in a street near the Lateran Church in Rome. Orsini, a Roman nobleman, and his friends are attempting to abduct Irene, the sister of Rienzi, a Papal notary. They are disturbed by the entrance of Colonna, another Roman noble, and his adherents. The two ruffians quarrel over the unfortunate girl; their followers eagerly join in the fray; and in a moment, as it seems, the quiet street is alive with the *cliquetis* of steel and the flash of sword-blades. Adriano, Colonna's son, loves Irene, and when he discovers who the trembling victim of patrician lust really is, he hastens to protect her. The tumult soon attracts a crowd to the spot. Last comes Rienzi, indignant at the insult offered to his sister, and bent upon revenge. Adriano, torn by conflicting emotions, decides to throw in his lot with Rienzi, and the act ends with the appointment of the latter to the post of Tribune—he refuses the title of King—and the marshalling of the plebeians against the recreant aristocracy. The arms of the people carry the day, and in the second act the nobles appear at the Capitol to sue for pardon. Rienzi, though warned of their treachery by Adriano, accepts their promise of submission. During the festivities which celebrate the reconciliation Orsini attempts to assassinate Rienzi, who is only saved by the steel breastplate which he wears beneath his robes. For this outrage the nobles are condemned to death. Adriano begs for his father's life, and Rienzi weakly relents, and grants his prayer on condition of the nobles taking an oath of submission.

In the third act the struggle between the nobles and the people advances another stage. The

nobles have once more broken their oath, and are drawn up in battle array at the gates of Rome. Rienzi marshals his forces and prepares to march forth against them. In vain Adriano pleads once more for pardon. The fortune of war goes in favour of the plebeians. The nobles are routed, Colonna is slain, and the scene closes as Adriano vows vengeance over his father's body upon his murderer.

In the fourth act the tide has turned against Rienzi. The citizens suspect him of treachery to their cause. Adriano joins the ranks of malcontents, and does all in his power to fire them to vengeance. Rienzi appears, and is at once surrounded by the conspirators, but in a speech of noble patriotism he convinces them of their mistakes, and wins them once more to allegiance. Suddenly the doors of the Lateran Church are thrown open; the Papal Legate appears, and reads aloud the Bull of Rienzi's excommunication. Horror-stricken at the awful sentence, the Tribune's friends forsake him and fly, all save Irene, who, deaf to the wild entreaties of Adriano, clings to her brother in passionate devotion.

In the fifth act, Rienzi, after a last vain attempt to arouse the patriotism of the people, seeks refuge in the Capitol, which is fired by the enraged mob. The Tribune and Irene perish in the flames, together with Adriano, whose love for Irene proves stronger than death.

Wagner himself has described the frame of mind in which he began to work at 'Rienzi': "To do something grand, to write an opera for whose production only the most exceptional means should suffice...this is what resolved me to resume, and carry out with all my might, my former plan of 'Rienzi.' In the preparation of this text I took no thought for anything but the writing of an effective operatic libretto." In the light of this confession, it is best to look upon 'Rienzi' merely as a brilliant exercise in the Grand Opéra manner. Much of the music is showy and effective; there is a masculine vigour about the melodies, and the concerted pieces are skilfully treated, but, except to the student of Wagner's development, its intrinsic value is very small.

Appropriately enough, the idea of writing an opera upon the legend of the Flying Dutchman first occurred to Wagner during his passage from Riga to London in the year 1839. The voyage was long and stormy, and the tempestuous weather which he encountered, together with the fantastic tales which he heard from the lips of the sailors, made so deep an impression upon his mind, that he determined to make his experiences the groundwork of an opera dealing with the fortunes of the 'Wandering Jew of the Ocean.' When he was in Paris, the stress of poverty compelled him to treat the sketch, which he had made for a libretto, as a marketable asset. This he sold to a now forgotten composer named Dietsch, who wrote an opera upon the subject, which failed completely. The disappearance of this work left Wagner's hands free once more, and some years later he returned *con amore* to his original idea. 'Der Fliegende Holländer' was produced at Dresden in 1843.

The legend of the Flying Dutchman is, of course, an old one. The idea of the world-wearied wanderer driven from shore to shore in the vain search for peace and rest dates from Homer. Heine was the first to introduce the motive of the sinner's redemption through the love of a faithful woman, which was still further elaborated by Wagner, and really forms the basis of his drama. The opera opens in storm and tempest. The ship of Daland, a Norwegian mariner, has just cast anchor at a wild and rugged spot upon the coast not far from his own home, where his daughter Senta is awaiting him. He can do nothing but wait for fair weather, and goes below, leaving his steersman to keep watch. The lad drops asleep, singing of his home, and through the darkness the gloomy vessel of the Dutchman is seen approaching with its blood-red sails. The Dutchman anchors his ship close to the Norwegian barque, and steps ashore. Seven years have passed since he last set foot upon earth, and he comes once more in search of a true woman who will sacrifice herself for his salvation, for this alone can free him from the curse under which he suffers. But hope of mortal aid is dead within his breast. In wild and broken accents he tells of his passionate longing for death, and calls upon the Judgment Day to put an end to his pilgrimage. 'Annihilation be my lot,' he cries in his madness, and from the depths of the black vessel the weird crew echoes his despairing cry. Daland issues from his own vessel and gives the stranger a hearty greeting. The name of

Senta arrests the Dutchman's attention, and after a short colloquy and a glimpse of the untold wealth which crams the coffers of the Dutchman, the old miser consents to give his daughter to the stranger. The wind meanwhile has shifted, and the two captains hasten their departure for the port.

In the second act we are at Daland's house. Mary, the old housekeeper, and a bevy of chattering girls are spinning by the fireside, while Senta, lost in gloomy reverie, sits apart gazing at a mysterious picture on the wall, the portrait of a pale man clad in black, the hero of the mysterious legend of the Flying Dutchman. The girls rally Senta upon her abstraction, and as a reply to their idle prattle she sings them the ballad of the doomed mariner. Throughout the song her enthusiasm has been waxing, and at its close, like one inspired, she cries aloud that she will be the woman to save him, that through her the accursed wretch shall find eternal peace. Erik, her betrothed lover, who enters to announce the approach of Daland, hears her wild words, and in vain reminds her of vows and promises made long ago. When Daland brings the Dutchman in, and Senta sees before her the hero of her romance, the living embodiment of the mysterious picture, she gazes spell-bound at the weird stranger, and seems scarcely to hear her father's hasty recommendation of the new suitor's pretensions. Left alone with the Dutchman, Senta rapturously vows her life to his salvation, and the scene ends with the plighting of their troth.

In the last act we are once more on the seashore. The Dutch and Norwegian vessels are moored side by side, but while the crew of the latter is feasting and making merry, the former is gloomy and silent as the grave. A troop of damsels runs on with baskets of food and wine; they join with the Norwegian sailors in calling upon the Dutchmen to come out and share their festivities, but not a sound proceeds from the phantom vessel. Suddenly the weird mariners appear upon the deck, and while blue flames hover upon the spars and masts of their fated vessel, they sing an uncanny song taunting their captain with his failure as a lover. The Norwegian sailors in terror hurry below, the girls beat a hasty retreat, and silence descends once more upon the two vessels. Senta issues from Daland's house, followed by Erik. In spite of his importunity, her steadfast purpose remains unmoved; but the Dutchman overhears Erik's passionate appeal and, believing Senta to be untrue to himself, rushes on board his ship and hastily puts out to sea. Senta's courage rises to the occasion. Though the Dutchman has cast her off, she remains true to her vows. She hastens to the edge of the cliff hard by, and with a wild cry hurls herself into the sea. Her solemn act of renunciation fulfils the promise of her lips. The gloomy vessel of the Dutchman, its mission accomplished, sinks into the waves, while the forms of Senta and the Dutchman transfigured with unearthly light are seen rising from the bosom of the ocean.

The music of 'Der Fliegende Holländer' may be looked at from two points of view. As a link in the chain of Wagner's artistic development, it is of the highest interest. In it we see the germs of those theories which were afterwards to effect so formidable a revolution in the world of opera. In 'Der Fliegende Holländer' Wagner first puts to the proof the *Leit-Motiv*, or guiding theme, the use of which forms, as it were, the base upon which the entire structure of his later works rests. In those early days he employed it with timidity, it is true, and with but a half-hearted appreciation of the poetical effect which it commands; but from that day forth each of his works shows a more complete command of its resources, and a subtler instinct as to its employment. The intrinsic musical interest of 'Der Fliegende Holländer' is unequal. Wagner had made great strides since the days of 'Rienzi,' but he had still a vast amount to unlearn. Side by side with passages of vital force and persuasive beauty there are dreary wastes of commonplace and the most arid conventionality. The strange mixture of styles which prevails in 'Der Fliegende Holländer' makes it in some ways even less satisfactory as a work of art than 'Rienzi,' which at any rate has the merit of homogeneity. Wagner is most happily inspired by the sea. The overture, as fresh and picturesque a piece of tone-painting as anything he ever wrote, is familiar to all concert-goers, and the opening of the first act is no less original. But perhaps the most striking part of the opera, certainly the most characteristic, is the opening of the third act, with its chain of choruses between the girls and the sailors. A great deal of 'Der Fliegende Holländer' might have been written by any operatic composer of the time, but this scene bears upon it the hall-mark of genius.

If 'Der Fliegende Holländer' proved that the descriptive side of Wagner's genius had developed

more rapidly than the psychological, the balance was promptly re-established in 'Tannhäuser,' his next work. Much of the music is picturesque and effective, even in the lowest sense, but its strength lies in the extraordinary power which the composer displays of individualising his characters—a power of which in 'Der Fliegende Holländer' there was scarcely a suggestion.

So far as mere form is concerned, 'Tannhäuser' (1845) is far freer from the conventionalities of the Italian school than 'Der Fliegende Holländer,' but this would not have availed much if Wagner's constructive powers had not matured in so remarkable a way. It would have been useless to sweep away the old conventions if he had had nothing to set in their place. Apart from the strictly musical side of the question, Wagner had in 'Tannhäuser' a story of far deeper human interest than the weird legend of the Dutchman, the tale which never grows old of the struggle of good and evil for a human soul, the tale of a remorseful sinner won from the powers of hell by the might of a pure woman's love.

There is a legend which tells that when the gods and goddesses fled from their palace on Olympus before the advance of Christianity, Venus betook herself to the North, and established her court in the bowels of the earth, beneath the hill of Höselsberg in Thuringia. There we find the minstrel Tannhäuser at the opening of the opera. He has left the world above, its strifes and its duties, for the wicked delights of the grotto of Venus. There he lies in the embraces of the siren goddess, while life passes in a ceaseless orgy of sinful pleasure. But the poet wearies of his amorous captivity, and would fain return to the earth once more. In vain the goddess pleads, in vain she calls up new scenes of ravishing delight, he still prays to be gone. Finally he calls on the sainted name of Mary, and Venus with her nymphs, grotto, palace and all, sink into the earth with a thunder-clap, while Tannhäuser, when he comes to his senses once more, finds himself kneeling upon the green grass on the slope of a sequestered valley, lulled by the tinkling bells of the flock and the piping of a shepherd from a rock hard by. The pious chant of pilgrims, passing on their way to Rome, wakens his slumbering conscience, and bids him expiate his guilt by a life of abstinence and humiliation. His meditations are interrupted by the appearance of the Landgrave of Thuringia, his liege lord, who is hunting with Wolfram von Eschinbach, Walther von der Vogelweide, and other minstrel-knights of the Wartburg; but his newly awakened sense of remorse forbids him to return with them to the castle, until Wolfram breathes the name of the Landgrave's niece Elisabeth, the saintly maiden who has drooped and pined since Tannhäuser disappeared from the singing contests at the Wartburg. The thought of human love touches his heart with warm sympathy, and he gladly hastens to the castle with his newly found friends.

In the second act we are at the Wartburg, in the Hall of Song in which those tournaments of minstrelsy were held, for which the castle was celebrated in the middle ages. Elisabeth enters, bringing a greeting to the hall, whose threshold she has not crossed since Tannhäuser's mysterious departure. Her joyous tones have scarcely ceased when Tannhäuser, led by Wolfram, appears and falls at the feet of the youthful Princess. Her pure spirit cannot conceive aught of dishonour in his absence, and she welcomes him back to her heart with girlish trust. Now the guests assemble and, marshalled in order, take their places for the singers' tourney. The Landgrave announces the subject of the contest—the power Of love—and more than hints that the hand of Elisabeth is to be the victor's prize. The singers in turn take their harps and pour forth their improvisations; Wolfram sings of the chaste ideal which he worships from afar, Walther of the pure fount of virtue from which he draws his inspiration, and the warrior Biterolf praises the chivalrous passion of the soldier.

Each in turn is interrupted by Tannhäuser, who, with ever-growing vehemence, scoffs at the pale raptures of his friends. A kind of madness possesses him, and as the hymns in praise of love recall to his memory the amorous orgies of the Venusberg, he gradually loses all self-control, and ends by bursting out with a wild hymn in praise of the goddess herself. The horror-stricken women rush from the hall, and the men, sword in hand, prepare to execute summary justice upon the self-convicted sinner; but Elisabeth dashes in before the points of their swords, and in broken accents begs pardon for her recreant lover in the name of the Saviour of them all. Touched by her agonised pleading the angry knights let fall their weapons, while Tannhäuser, as his madness slips from him

and he realises all that he has lost, falls repentant and prostrate upon the earth. The Landgrave bids him hasten to Rome, where alone he may find pardon for a sin so heinous. Far below in the valley a band of young pilgrims is passing, and the sound of their solemn hymn rises to the castle windows; the pious strains put new life into the despairing Tannhäuser, and crying 'To Rome, to Rome,' he staggers from the hall.

The scene of the third act is the same as that of the first, a wooded valley beneath the towers of the Wartburg; but the fresh beauty of spring has given place to the tender melancholy of autumn. No tidings of the pilgrim have reached the castle, and Elisabeth waits on in patient hope, praying that her lost lover may be given back to her arms free and forgiven. While she pours forth her agony at the foot of a rustic cross, the faithful Wolfram watches silently hard by. Suddenly the distant chant of the pilgrims is heard. Elisabeth rises from her knees in an agony of suspense. As the pilgrims file past one by one, she eagerly scans their faces, but Tannhäuser is not among them. With the failure of her hopes she feels that the last link which binds her to earth is broken. Committing her soul to the Virgin, she takes her way slowly back to the castle, the hand of death already heavy upon her, after bidding farewell to Wolfram in a passage which, though not a word is spoken, is perhaps more poignantly pathetic than anything Wagner ever wrote. Alone amid the gathering shades of evening, Wolfram sings the exquisite song to the evening star which is the most famous passage in the opera. The last strains have scarcely died away when a gloomy figure slowly enters upon the path lately trodden by the rejoicing pilgrims. It is Tannhäuser returning from Rome, disappointed and despairing. His pilgrimage has availed him nothing. The Pope bade him hope for no pardon for his sin till the staff which he held in his hand should put forth leaves and blossom. With these awful words ringing in his ears, Tannhäuser has retraced his weary steps. He has had enough of earth, and thinks only of returning to the embraces of Venus. In response to his cries Venus appears, in the midst of a wild whirl of nymphs and sirens. In vain Wolfram urges and appeals; Tannhäuser will not yield his purpose. He breaks from his friend, and is rushing to meet the extended arms of the goddess, when Wolfram adjures him once more by the sainted memory of Elisabeth. At the sound of that sinless name Venus and her unhallowed crew sink with a wild shriek into the earth. The morning breaks, and the solemn hymn of the procession bearing the corpse of Elisabeth sounds sweetly through the forest. As the bier is carried forward Tannhäuser sinks lifeless by the dead body of his departed saint, while a band of young pilgrims comes swiftly in, bearing the Pope's staff, which has put forth leaves and blossomed—the symbol of redemption and pardon for the repentant sinner.

It will generally be admitted that the story of 'Tannhäuser' is better suited for dramatic purposes than that of 'Der Fliegende Holländer,' apart from the lofty symbolism which gives it so deeply human an interest. This would go far to account for the manifest superiority of the later work, but throughout the score it is easy to note the enhanced power and certainty of the composer in dealing even with the less interesting parts of the story. Much of 'Tannhäuser' is conventional, but it nevertheless shows a great advance on 'Der Fliegende Holländer,' in the disposal of the scenes as much as in the mere treatment of the voices. But in the orchestra the advance is even more manifest. The guiding theme, which in 'Der Fliegende Holländer' only makes fitful and timid appearances, is used with greater boldness, and with increased knowledge of its effect. Wagner had as yet, it is true, but little conception of the importance which this flexible instrument would assume in his later works; but such passages as the orchestral introduction to the third act, and Tannhäuser's narration, give a foretaste of what the composer was afterwards to achieve by this means. So far as orchestral colour is concerned, too, the score of Tannhäuser is deeply interesting to the student of Wagner's development. Here we find Wagner for the first time consistently associating a certain instrument or group of instruments with one of the characters, as, for instance, the trombones with the pilgrims, and the wood-wind with Elisabeth. This plan—which is in a certain sense the outcome of the guiding theme system—he was afterwards to develop elaborately. It had of course been employed before, notably by Gluck, but Wagner with characteristic boldness carried it at once to a point of which his predecessor can scarcely have dreamed. As an illustration, the opening of the third act may be quoted, in which Elisabeth is represented by the wood-wind—by the clarinets and bassoons in the hour of her deep affliction and

abasement, and by the flutes and hautboys when her soul has finally cast off all the trammels of earth—and Wolfram by the violoncello. The feelings of the two are so exquisitely portrayed by the orchestra, that the scene would be easily comprehensible if it were carried on—as indeed much of it is—without any words at all.

'Lohengrin' (1850) was the first of Wagner's operas which won general acceptance, and still remains the most popular. The story lacks the deep human interest of 'Tannhäuser,' but it has both power and picturesqueness, while the prominence of the love-interest, which in the earlier work is thrust into the background, is sufficient to explain the preference given to it. Elsa of Brabant is charged by Frederick of Telramund, at the instigation of his wife Ortrud, with the murder of her brother Godfrey, who has disappeared. King Henry the Fowler, who is judging the case, allows Elsa a champion; but the signal trumpets have sounded twice, and no one comes forward to do battle on her behalf. Suddenly there appears, in a distant bend of the river Scheldt, a boat drawn by a swan, in which is standing a knight clad in silver armour. Amidst the greatest excitement the knight gradually approaches, and finally disembarks beneath the shadow of the king's oak. He is accepted by Elsa as her champion and lover on the condition that she shall never attempt to ask his name. If she should violate her promise, Lohengrin—for it is he—must return at once to his father's kingdom. Telramund is worsted in the fight, having no power to fight against Lohengrin's sacred sword, and the act ends with rejoicings over the approaching marriage of Lohengrin and Elsa.

In the second act it is night; Telramund and Ortrud are crouching upon the steps of the Minster, opposite the palace, plotting revenge. Suddenly Elsa steps out upon the balcony of the Kemenate, or women's quarters, and breathes out the tale of her happiness to the breezes of night. Ortrud accosts her with affected humility, and soon succeeds in establishing herself once more in the good graces of the credulous damsel. She passes into the Kemenate with Elsa, first promising to use her magic powers so as to secure for ever for Elsa the love of her unknown lord. Elsa rejects the offer with scorn, but it is evident that the suggestion has sown the first seeds of doubt in her foolish heart. As the day dawns the nobles assemble at the Minster gate, and soon the long bridal procession begins to issue from the Kemenate. But before Elsa has had time to set foot upon the Minster steps, Ortrud dashes forward and claims precedence, taunting the hapless bride with ignorance of her bridegroom's name and rank. Elsa has scarcely time to reply in passionate vindication of her love, when the King and Lohengrin approach from the Pallas, the quarters of the knights. Lohengrin soothes the terror of his bride, and the procession starts once more. Once more it is interrupted. Telramund appears upon the threshold of the cathedral and publicly accuses Lohengrin of sorcery. The King, however, will not harbour a suspicion of his spotless knight. Telramund is thrust aside, though not before he has had time to whisper fresh doubts and suspicions to the shuddering Elsa, and the procession files slowly into the Minster.

A solemn bridal march opens the next act, while the maids of honour conduct Elsa and Lohengrin to the bridal chamber. There, after a love scene of enchanting beauty, her doubts break forth once more. 'How is she to know,' she cries, 'that the swan will not come some day as mysteriously as before and take her beloved from her arms?' In vain Lohengrin tries to soothe her; she will not be appeased, and in frenzied excitement puts to him the fatal question, 'Who art thou?' At that moment the door is burst open, and Telramund rushes in followed by four knights with swords drawn. Lohengrin lifts his sacred sword, and the false knight falls dead at his feet. The last scene takes us back to the banks of the Scheldt. Before the assembled army Lohengrin answers Elsa's question. He is the son of Parsifal, the lord of Monsalvat, the keeper of the Holy Grail. His mission is to succour the distressed, but his mystic power vanishes if the secret of its origin be known. Even as he speaks the swan appears once more, drawing the boat which is to bear him away. Lohengrin bids a last farewell to the weeping Elsa, and turns once more to the river. Now is the moment of Ortrud's triumph. She rushes forward and proclaims that the swan is none other than Godfrey, Elsa's brother, imprisoned in this shape by her magic arts. But Lohengrin's power is not exhausted; he kneels upon the river bank, and in answer to his prayer the white dove of the Grail wheels down from the sky, releases the swan, and, while Elsa clasps her restored brother to



her breast, bears Lohengrin swiftly away over the waters of the Scheldt.

The interest of 'Lohengrin' lies rather in the subtle treatment of the characters than in the intrinsic beauty of the story itself. Lohengrin's love for Elsa, and his apparent intention of settling in Brabant for life, seem scarcely consistent with his duties as knight of the Grail, and, save for their mutual love, neither hero nor heroine have much claim upon our sympathies. But the grouping of the characters is admirable; the truculent witch Ortrud is a fine foil to the ingenuous Elsa, and Lohengrin's spotless knighthood is cast into brilliant relief by the dastardly treachery of Telramund. The story of 'Lohengrin' lacks the deep human interest of 'Tannhäuser,' and the music never reaches the heights to which the earlier work sometimes soars. But in both respects 'Lohengrin' has the merit of homogeneity; the libretto is laid out by a master hand, and the music, though occasionally monotonous in rhythm, has none of those strange relapses into conventionality which mar the beauty of 'Tannhäuser.' Musically 'Lohengrin' marks the culminating point of Wagner's earlier manner. All the links with the Italian school are broken save one, the concerted finale. Here alone he adheres to the old tradition of cavatina and cabaletta—the slow movement followed by the quick. The aria in set form has completely disappeared, while the orchestra, though still often used merely as an accompaniment, is never degraded, as occasionally happens in 'Tannhäuser,' to the rank of a 'big guitar.'

The opening notes of 'Lohengrin' indeed prove incontestably the increased power and facility with which Wagner had learnt to wield his orchestra since the days of 'Tannhäuser.' The prelude to 'Lohengrin'—a mighty web of sound woven of one single theme—is, besides being a miracle of contrapuntal ingenuity, one of the most poetical of Wagner's many exquisite conceptions. In it he depicts the bringing to earth by the hands of angels of the Holy Grail, the vessel in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the last drops of Christ's blood upon the cross. With the opening chords we seem to see the clear blue expanse of heaven spread before us in spotless radiance. As the Grail motive sounds for the first time *pianissimo* in the topmost register of the violins, a tiny white cloud, scarcely perceptible at first, but increasing every moment, forms in the zenith. Ever descending as the music gradually increases in volume, the cloud resolves itself into a choir of angels clad in white, the bearers of the sacred cup. Nearer and still nearer they come, until, as the Grail motive reaches a passionate *fortissimo*, they touch the earth, and deliver the Holy Grail to the band of faithful men who are consecrated to be its earthly champions. Their mission accomplished the angels swiftly return. As they soar up, the music grows fainter. Soon they appear once more only as a snowy cloud on the bosom of the blue. The Grail motive fades away into faint chords, and the heaven is left once more in cloudless radiance.

A noticeable point in the score of 'Lohengrin' is the further development of the beautiful idea which appears in 'Tannhäuser,' of associating a certain instrument or group of instruments with one particular character. The idea itself, it may be noticed in passing, dates from the time of Bach, who used the strings of the orchestra to accompany the words of Christ in the Matthew Passion, much as the old Italian painters surrounded his head with a halo. In 'Lohengrin' Wagner used this beautiful idea more systematically than in 'Tannhäuser'; Lohengrin's utterances are almost always accompanied by the strings of the orchestra, while the wood-wind is specially devoted to Elsa. This plan emphasises very happily the contrast, which is the root of the whole drama, between spiritual and earthly love, typified in the persons of Lohengrin and Elsa, which the poem symbolises in allegorical fashion.

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# CHAPTER X

## WAGNER'S LATER WORKS

The attempt to divide the life and work of a composer into fixed periods is generally an elusive and unsatisfactory experiment, but to this rule the case of Wagner is an exception. His musical career falls naturally into two distinct divisions, and the works of these two periods differ so materially in scope and execution that the veriest tyro in musical matters cannot fail to grasp their divergencies. In the years which elapsed between the composition of 'Lohengrin' and 'Das Rheingold,' Wagner's theories upon the proper treatment of lyrical drama developed in a surprising manner. Throughout his earlier works the guiding theme is used with increasing frequency, it is true, so that in 'Lohengrin' its employment adds materially to the poetical interest of the score; but in 'Das Rheingold' we are in a different world. Here the guiding theme is the pivot upon which the entire work turns. The occasional use of some characteristic musical phrase to illustrate the recurrence of a special personality or phase of thought has given way to a deliberate system in which not only each of the characters in the drama, but also their thoughts, feelings, and aspirations are represented by a distinct musical equivalent. These guiding themes are by no means the mere labels that hostile critics of Wagner would have us believe. They are subject, as much as the characters and sentiments which they represent, to organic change and development. By this means every incident in the progress of the drama, the growth of each sentiment or passion, the play of thought and feeling, all find a close equivalent in the texture of the music, and the connection between music and drama is advanced to an intimacy which certainly could not be realised by any other means.

The difference in style between 'Lohengrin' and 'Das Rheingold' is so very marked that it is only natural to look for some explanation of the sudden change other than the natural development of the composer's genius. Wagner's social position at this point in his career may have reacted to a certain extent upon his music. An exile from his country, his works tabooed in every theatre, he might well be pardoned if he felt that all chance of a career as a popular composer was over for him, and decided for the future to write for himself alone. This may explain the complete renunciation of the past which appears in 'Das Rheingold,' the total severance from the Italian tradition which lingers in the pages of 'Lohengrin,' and the brilliant unfolding of a new scheme of lyric drama planned upon a scale of unexampled magnificence and elaboration.

Intimately as Wagner's theory of the proper scope of music drama is connected with the system of guiding themes which he elaborated, it need hardly be said that he was very far from being the first to recognise the importance of their use in music. There are several instances of guiding themes in Bach. Beethoven, too, and even Grétry used them occasionally with admirable effect. But before Wagner's day they had been employed with caution, not to say timidity. He was the first to realise their full poetic possibility.

'Das Rheingold,' the first work in which Wagner put his matured musical equipment to the proof, is the first division of a gigantic tetralogy, 'Der Ring des Nibelungen.' The composition of this mighty work extended over a long period of years. It was often interrupted, and as often recommenced. In its completed form it was performed for the first time at the opening of the Festspielhaus at Bayreuth in 1876, but the first two divisions of the work, 'Das Rheingold' and 'Die Walküre,' had already been given at Munich, in 1869 and 1870 respectively. It will be most convenient in this place to treat 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' as a complete work, although 'Tristan und Isolde' and 'Die Meistersinger' were written and performed before 'Siegfried' and 'Götterdämmerung.'

Wagner took the main incidents of his drama from the old Norse sagas, principally from the two Eddas, but in many minor points his tale varies from that of the original authorities. Nevertheless he grasped the spirit of the myth so fully, that his version of the Nibelung story yields in harmony and beauty to that of none of his predecessors. There is one point about the Norse mythology which is

of the utmost importance to the proper comprehension of 'Der Ring des Nibelungen.' The gods of Teutonic legend are not immortal. In the Edda the death of the gods is often mentioned, and distinct reference is made to their inevitable downfall. Behind Valhalla towers the gigantic figure of Fate, whose reign is eternal. The gods rule for a limited time, subject to its decrees. This ever-present idea of inexorable doom is the guiding idea of Wagner's great tragedy. Against the inevitable the gods plot and scheme in vain.

The opening scene of 'Das Rheingold' is in the depths of the Rhine. There, upon the summit of a rock, lies the mysterious treasure of the Rhine, the Rhine-gold, guarded night and day by the three Rhine-maidens Wellgunde, Woglinde, and Flosshilde, who circle round the rock in an undulating dance, joyous and light-hearted 'like troutlets in a pool.' Alberich, the prince of the Nibelungs, the strange dwarf-people who dwell in the bowels of the earth, now appears. Clumsily he courts the maidens, trying unsuccessfully to catch first one, then another. Suddenly the rays of the rising sun touch the treasure on the rock and light it into brilliant splendour. The maidens, in delight at its beauty, incautiously reveal the secret of the Rhine-gold to the inquisitive dwarf. The possessor of it, should he forge it into a ring, will become the ruler of the world. But, to that end, he must renounce the delights of love for ever. Alberich, fired with the lust of power, hastily climbs the rock, tears away the shining treasure, and plunges with it into the abyss, amidst the cries of the maidens, who vainly endeavour to pursue him. The scene now changes, the waves gradually giving place to clouds and vapour, which in turn disclose a lofty mountainous region at the foot of which is a grassy plateau. Here lie the sleeping forms of Wotan, the king of the gods, and Fricka, his wife. Behind them, upon a neighbouring mountain, rise the towers of Valhalla, Wotan's new palace, built for him by the giants Fafner and Fasolt in order to ensure him in his sovereignty of the world. In exchange for their labours Wotan has promised to give them Freia, the goddess of love and beauty, but he hopes by the ingenuity of Loge, the fire-god, to escape the fulfilment of his share of the contract. While Fricka is upbraiding him for his rash promise Freia enters, pursued by the giants, who come to claim their reward. Wotan refuses to let Freia go, and Froh and Donner come to the protection of their sister. The giants are prepared to fight for their rights, but the entrance of Loge fortunately effects a diversion. He has searched throughout the world for something to offer to the giants instead of the beautiful goddess, but has only brought back the news of Alberich's treasure-trove, and his forswearing of love in order to rule the world. The lust of power now invades the minds of the giants, and they agree to take the treasure in place of Freia, if Wotan and Loge can succeed in stealing it from Alberich. On this quest therefore the two gods descended through a cleft in the earth to Nibelheim, the abode of the Nibelungs. There they find Alberich, by virtue of his magic gold, lording it over his fellow-dwarfs. He has compelled his brother Mime, the cleverest smith of them all, to fashion him a Tarnhelm, or helmet of invisibility, and the latter complains peevishly to the gods of the overbearing mastery which Alberich has established in Nibelheim. When Alberich appears, Wotan and Loge cunningly beguile him to exhibit the powers of his new treasures. The confiding dwarf, in order to display the quality of the Tarnhelm, first changes himself into a snake and then into a toad. While he is in the shape of the latter, Wotan sets his foot upon him, Loge snatches the Tarnhelm from his head, and together they bind him and carry him off to the upper air. When he has conveyed his prisoner in safety to the mountain-top, Wotan bids him summon the dwarfs to bring up his treasures from Nibelheim. Alberich reluctantly obeys. His treasure is torn from him, his Tarnhelm, and last of all the ring with which he hoped to rule the world. Bereft of all, he utters a terrible curse upon the ring, vowing that it shall bring ruin and death upon every one who wears it, until it returns to its original possessor. The giants now appear to claim their reward. They too insist upon taking the whole treasure. Wotan refuses to give up the ring until warned by the goddess Erda, the mother of the Fates, who rises from her subterranean cavern, that to keep it means ruin. The ring passes to the giants, and the curse at once begins to work. Fafner slays Fasolt in a quarrel for the gold, and carries off the treasure alone. Throughout this scene the clouds have been gathering round the mountain-top. Donner, the god of thunder, now ascends a cliff, and strikes the rock with his hammer. Thunder rolls and lightning flashes, the dark clouds are dispelled, revealing a rainbow bridge thrown across the chasm, over which the gods solemnly march to Valhalla, while from far below rise the despairing cries of the Rhine-

maidens lamenting their lost treasure.

'Das Rheingold' is conspicuous among the later works of Wagner for its brevity and concentration. Although it embraces four scenes, the music is continuous throughout, and the whole makes but one act. Wagner's aim seems to have been to set forth in a series of brilliant pictures the medium in which his mighty drama was to unfold itself. Human interest of course there is none, but the supernatural machinery is complete. The denizens of the world are grouped in four divisions—the gods in heaven, the giants on the earth, the dwarfs beneath, and the water-sprites in the bosom of the Rhine. 'Das Rheingold' has a freshness and an open-air feeling which are eminently suitable to the prologue of a work which deals so much with the vast forces of nature as Wagner's colossal drama. There is little scope in it for the delicate psychology which enriches the later divisions of the tetralogy, but, on the other hand, Wagner has reproduced the 'large utterance of the early gods' with exquisite art. Musically it can hardly rank with its successors, partly no doubt because the plot has not their absorbing interest, partly also because 'Das Rheingold' is the first work in which Wagner consciously worked in accordance with his theory of guiding themes, and consequently he had not as yet gained that complete mastery of his elaborate material which he afterwards attained. Yet some of the musical pictures in 'Das Rheingold' would be difficult to match throughout the glowing gallery of 'Der Ring des Nibelungen,' such as the beautiful opening scene in the depths of the Rhine, and the magnificent march to Valhalla with which it closes.

Before the opening of 'Die Walküre,' the next work of the series, much has happened. Wotan has begotten the nine Valkyries (*Walküren*, or choosers of the slain), whose mission is to bring up dead heroes from the battle-field to dwell in Valhalla, and, if need be, help to defend it. He determines, too, since he may not possess the ring himself, to beget a hero of the race of men who shall win it from Fafner (who has changed himself into a dragon in order to guard the treasure more securely), and so prevent it falling into the hands of an enemy of the gods. For this purpose he descends to earth and, under the name of Volsung, unites himself with a mortal woman, who bears him the Volsung twins, Siegmund and Sieglinde. Bound by his oath to Fafner, Wotan may not openly assist Siegmund in the enterprise, but he dwells with him on the earth, and trains him in all manly exercises. Sieglinde is carried off by enemies and given as wife to Hunding, and Siegmund returning one day from the chase finds his father gone, and nothing but an empty wolf-skin left in the hut. Alone he has to wage continual war with the enemies who surround him. One day, in defending a woman from wrong, he is overpowered by numbers, and losing his sword, has to fly for his life. With this 'Die Walküre' opens. A violent storm is raging when Siegmund reaches Hunding's hut. Exhausted by fatigue, he throws himself down by the hearth, and is soon fast asleep. Sieglinde entering offers him food and drink. Soon Hunding appears, and, after hearing his guest's name and history, discovers in him a mortal foe. Nevertheless the rights of hospitality are sacred. He offers Siegmund shelter for the night, but bids him be ready at dawn to fight for his life. Left alone, Siegmund muses in the dying firelight on the promise made him by his father, that at the hour of his direst need he should find a sword. His reverie is interrupted by the entrance of Sieglinde, who has drugged Hunding's night draught, and now urges Siegmund to flee. Each has read in the other's eyes the sympathy which is akin to love, and Siegmund refuses to leave her. Thereupon she tells him of a visit paid to the house upon the day of her marriage to Hunding by a mysterious stranger, who thrust a sword into the stem of the mighty ash-tree which supports the roof, promising it to him who could pull it out. Siegmund draws the sword (which he greets with the name of Nothung) in triumph from the tree, and the brother and sister, now united by a yet closer tie, fall into each other's arms as the curtain falls.

The scene of the next act is laid in a wild, mountainous region. Wotan has summoned his favourite daughter, the Valkyrie Brünnhilde, and directs her to protect Siegmund in the fight with Hunding which is soon to take place. Brünnhilde departs with her wild Valkyrie cry, and Fricka appears in a car drawn by two rams. She is the protectress of marriage rites, and come to complain of Siegmund's unlawful act in carrying off Sieglinde. A long altercation ensues between the pair. In the end Fricka is triumphant. She extorts an oath from Wotan that he will not protect Siegmund, and departs satisfied. Brünnhilde again appears, and another interminable scene

follows between her and Wotan. The father of the gods is weighed down by the sense of approaching annihilation. He now realises that the consequences of his lawless lust of power are beginning to work his ruin. He tells Brünnhilde the whole story of his schemes to avert destruction by the help of Siegmund and the Valkyries, ending by commanding her, under dreadful penalties, to leave the Volsung hero to his fate. Siegmund and Sieglinde now appear, flying from the vengeful Hunding. Sieglinde's strength is almost spent, and she sinks exhausted in a death-like swoon. While Siegmund is tenderly watching over her, Brünnhilde advances. She tells Siegmund of his approaching doom, and bids him prepare for the delights of Valhalla. He refuses to leave Sieglinde, and, rather than that they should be separated, he is ready to plunge his sword into both their hearts. His noble words melt Brünnhilde's purpose, and, in defiance of Wotan's commands, she promises to protect him. Hunding's horn is now heard in the distance, and Siegmund leaves Sieglinde still unconscious and rushes to the encounter. Amid the gathering storm-clouds the two men meet upon a rocky ridge. Brünnhilde protects Siegmund with her shield, but just as he is about to deal Hunding a fatal blow, Wotan appears in thunder and lightning and thrusts his spear between the combatants. Siegmund's sword is shivered to fragments upon it, and Hunding strikes him dead. Brünnhilde hastily collects the splinters of the sword, and escapes with Sieglinde upon her horse, while Hunding falls dead before a contemptuous wave of Wotan's hand.

The third act shows a rocky mountain-top in storm and tempest. One by one the Valkyries appear riding on their horses through the driving clouds. Last comes Brünnhilde, with the terrified and despairing Sieglinde. Sieglinde wishes to die, but Brünnhilde entreats her to live for the sake of her child that is to be, and giving her the splintered fragments of Siegmund's sword, bids her escape to the forest, where Fafner watches over his treasure. The voice of the wrathful Wotan is now heard in the distance. He appears, indignant at Brünnhilde's disobedience, dismisses the other Valkyries, and tells Brünnhilde what her punishment is to be. She is to be banished from the sisterhood of Valkyries, and Valhalla is to know her no more. Thrown into a deep sleep, she shall lie upon the mountain-top, to be the bride of the first man who finds and wakens her. Brünnhilde pleads passionately for a mitigation of the cruel sentence, or at least that a circle of fire shall be drawn around her resting-place, so that none but a hero of valour and determination can hope to win her. Moved by her entreaties, Wotan consents. He kisses her fondly to sleep, and lays her gently upon a mossy couch, covered with her shield. Then he strikes the earth with his spear, calling on the fire-god Loge. Tongues of fire spring up around them, and leaving her encircled with a rampart of flame, he passes from the mountain-top with the words, 'Let him who fears my spear-point never dare to pass through the fire.'

With 'Die Walküre' the human interest of 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' begins, and with it Wagner rises to greater heights than he could hope to reach in 'Das Rheingold.' In picturesque force and variety 'Die Walküre' does not yield to its predecessors, while the passion and beauty of the immortal tale of the Volsungs lifts it dramatically into a different world. 'Die Walküre' is the most generally popular of the four works which make up Wagner's great tetralogy, for the inordinate length of some of the scenes in the second act is amply atoned for by the immortal beauties of the first and third. Twenty years ago Wagner's enemies used to make capital out of the incestuous union of Siegmund and Sieglinde, but it is difficult to believe in the sincerity of their virtuous indignation. No sane person would conceivably attempt to judge the personages of the Edda by a modern code of ethics; nor could any one with even a smattering of the details of Greek mythology affect to regard such a union as extraordinary, given the environment in which the characters of Wagner's drama move. It may be noted in passing that 'Die Walküre' is the latest of Wagner's works in which the traces of his earlier manner are still perceptible. For the most part, as in all his later works, the score is one vast many-coloured web of guiding themes, 'a mighty maze, but not without a plan!' Here and there, however, occur passages, such as the Spring Song in the first act and the solemn melody which pervades Brünnhilde's interview with Siegmund in the second, which, beautiful in themselves as they are, seem reminiscent of earlier and simpler days, and scarcely harmonise with the colour scheme of the rest of the work.

With 'Siegfried' the drama advances another stage. Many years have elapsed since the tragic

close of 'Die Walküre.' Sieglinde dragged herself to the forest, and there died in giving birth to a son, Siegfried, who has been brought up by the dwarf Mime in the hope that when grown to manhood the boy may slay the dragon and win for him the Nibelung treasure. The drama opens in Mime's hut in the depths of the forest. The dwarf is engaged in forging a sword for Siegfried, complaining the while that the ungrateful boy always dashes the swords which he makes to pieces upon the anvil as though they were toys. Siegfried now comes in, blithe and boisterous, and treats Mime's new sword like its predecessors, blaming the unfortunate smith for his incompetence. Mime reproaches Siegfried for his ingratitude, reminding him of the care with which he nursed him in childish days. Siegfried cannot believe that Mime is his father, and in a fit of passion forces the dwarf to tell him the real story of his birth. Mime at length reluctantly produces the fragments of Siegmund's sword, and Siegfried, bidding him forge it anew, rushes out once more into the forest. The dwarf is settling down to his task, when his solitude is disturbed by the advent of a mysterious stranger. It is Wotan, disguised as a wanderer, who has visited the earth to watch over the offspring of his Volsung son, and to see how events are shaping themselves with regard to the Nibelung treasure. The scene between him and Mime is exceedingly long, and, though of the highest musical interest and beauty, does very little to advance the plot. The god and the dwarf ask each other a series of riddles, each staking his head upon the result. Mime breaks down at the question, 'Who is to forge the sword Nothung anew?' Wotan tells him the answer, 'He who knows not fear,' and departs with the contemptuous reminder that the dwarf has forfeited his head to the fearless hero. Siegfried now returns, and is very angry when he finds that Mime has not yet forged the sword. The frightened dwarf confesses that the task is beyond his powers, and finding that Siegfried does not know what fear is, tells him to forge his sword for himself. Siegfried then proceeds to business. He files the pieces to dust and melts them in a melting-pot, singing a wild song as he fans the flames with a huge bellows. Next he pours the melted steel into a mould and plunges it into water to cool, heats it red-hot in the furnace, and lastly hammers it on the anvil. When all is finished he brandishes the sword, and, to the mingled terror and delight of Mime, with one mighty stroke cleaves the anvil in twain.

The next act shows a glen in the gloomy forest close to Fafner's lair. Alberich is watching in the darkness, in the vain hope of finding an opportunity of recovering his lost treasure. Wotan appears, and taunts him with his impotence, telling him meanwhile of Siegfried's speedy arrival. Mime and Siegfried soon appear. The dwarf tries to excite the feeling of fear in Siegfried's bosom by a blood-curdling description of the terrible dragon, but finding it useless, leaves Siegfried at the mouth of Fafner's cave and retires into the brake. Left alone, Siegfried yields to the fascination of the summer woods. Round him, as he lies beneath a giant linden-tree, the singing of birds and the murmur of the forest blend in a mysterious symphony. His thoughts fly back to his dead mother and his lonely childhood. But his reverie is interrupted by the awakening of Fafner, who resents his intrusion. Siegfried boldly attacks his terrible foe, and soon puts an end to him. As he draws his sword from the dragon's heart, a rush of blood wets his hand. He feels it burn, and involuntarily puts his hand to his lips. Forthwith, by virtue of the magic power of the blood, he understands the song of the birds, and as he listens he hears the warning voice of one of them in the linden-tree telling him of the Tarnhelm and the ring. Armed with these he comes forth from the dragon's cave to find Mime, who has come to offer him a draught from his drinking-horn after his labours. But the dragon's blood enables him to read the thoughts in the dwarf's heart under his blandishing words. The draught is poisoned, and Mime hopes by slaying Siegfried to gain the Nibelung hoard. With one blow of his sword Siegfried slays the treacherous dwarf, and, guided by his friendly bird, hastens away to the rock where Brünnhilde lies within the flaming rampart awaiting the hero who shall release her.

The third act represents a wild landscape at the foot of Brünnhilde's rock. Wotan once more summons Erda, and bids her prophesy concerning the doom of the gods. She knows nothing of the future, and Wotan professes himself resigned to hand over his sovereignty to the youthful Siegfried, who shall deliver the world from Alberich's curse. Erda sinks once more into her cavern, and Siegfried appears, led by the faithful bird. Wotan attempts to bar his passage, but Siegfried will brook no interference, and he shivers Wotan's spear (the emblem of the older rule of the gods)

with a blow of his sword. Gaily singing, he passes up through the fire, and finds Brünnhilde asleep upon her rock. Love teaches him the fear which he could not learn from Fafner. He awakens the sleeper, and would clasp her in his arms, but Brünnhilde, who fell asleep a goddess, knows not that she has awaked a woman. She flies from him, but his passion melts her, and, her godhead slipping from her, she yields to his embrace.

'Siegfried,' as has been happily observed, is the scherzo of the great Nibelung symphony. After the sin and sorrow of 'Die Walküre' the change to the free life of the forest and the boyish innocence of the youthful hero is doubly refreshing. 'Siegfried' is steeped in the spirit of youth. There breathes through it the freshness of the early world. Wagner loved it best of his works. He called it 'the most beautiful of my life's dreams.' Though less stirring in incident than 'Die Walküre,' it is certainly more sustained in power. It is singularly free from those lapses into musical aridity which occasionally mar the beauty of the earlier work. If the poem from time to time sinks to an inferior level, the music is instinct with so much resource and beauty that there can be no question of dulness. In 'Siegfried,' in fact, Wagner's genius reaches its zenith. In power, picturesqueness, and command of orchestral colour and resource, he never surpassed such scenes as the opening of the third act, or Siegfried's scaling of Brünnhilde's rock. It is worth while remarking that an interval of twelve years elapsed between the composition of the second and third acts of 'Siegfried.' In 1857, although 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' was well advanced towards completion, Wagner's courage gave way. The possibility of seeing his great work performed seemed so terribly remote, that he decided for the time being to abandon it and begin on a work of more practicable dimensions. In 1869 King Ludwig of Bavaria induced him to return to the attack, and with what delight he did so may easily be imagined. At first sight it seems strange that there should be such complete harmony between the parts of the work, which were written at such different times. The explanation of course lies in the firm fabric of guiding themes, which is the sure foundation upon which the score of 'Siegfried' is built. Had Wagner trusted merely to the casual inspiration of the moment, it is possible that the new work would have harmonised but ill with the old; as it was, he had but to gather up the broken threads of his unfinished work to find himself once more under the same inspiration as before. His theory still held good; his materials were the same; he had but to work under the same conditions to produce work of the same quality as before.

In 'Götterdämmerung' we leave the cool forest once more for the haunts of men, and exchange the sinless purity of youth for envy, malice, and all uncharitableness. The prologue takes us once more to the summit of Brünnhilde's rock. There, in the dim grey of early dawn, sit the three Norns, unravelling from their thread of gold the secrets of the present, past, and future. As the morning dawns the thread snaps, and they hurry away. In the broadening light of day Siegfried and Brünnhilde appear. The Valkyrie has enriched her husband from her store of hidden wisdom, and now sends him forth in quest of new adventures. She gives him her shield and Grane, her horse, and he in turn gives her his ring, as a pledge of his love and constancy. He hastens down the side of the mountain, and the note of his horn sounds fainter and fainter as he takes his way across the Rhine.

The first act shows the hall of the castle of the Gibichungs near the Rhine. Heredwell Gunther and his sister Gutrune, and their half-brother Hagen, whose father was the Nibelung Alberich. Hagen knows the story of the ring, and that its present possessor is Siegfried, and he devises a crafty scheme for getting Siegfried into his power. Gunther is still unmarried, and, fired by Hagen's tale of the sleeping Valkyrie upon the rock of fire, yearns to have Brünnhilde for his wife. Hagen therefore proposes that Gutrune should be given to Siegfried, and that the latter, who is the only hero capable of passing through the fire, should in return win Brünnhilde for Gunther. In the nick of time Siegfried arrives. Hagen brews him a magic potion, by virtue of which he forgets all his former life, and his previous love for Brünnhilde is swallowed up in a burning passion for Gutrune. He quickly agrees to Hagen's proposal, and assuming the form of Gunther by means of the Tarnhelm, he departs once more for Brünnhilde's rock. Meanwhile Brünnhilde sits at the entrance to her cave upon the fire-girt cliff, musing upon Siegfried's ring. Suddenly she hears the old well-known Valkyrie war-cry echoing down from the clouds. It is her sister Waltraute, who comes to tell her of

the gloom that reigns in Valhalla, and to entreat her to give up the ring once more to the Rhine-maidens, that the curse may be removed and that the gods may not perish. Brünnhilde, however, treasures the symbol of Siegfried's love more than the glory of heaven, and refuses to give it up. She defies the gods, and Waltraute takes her way sadly back to Valhalla. Now Siegfried's horn sounds in the distance far below. Brünnhilde hurries to meet him, and is horrified to see, not her beloved hero, but a stranger appear upon the edge of the rocky platform. The disguised Siegfried announces himself as Gunther, and after a struggle overcomes Brünnhilde's resistance and robs her of the ring. This reduces her to submission; he bids her enter her chamber and follows her, first drawing his sword, which is to lie between them, a proof of his fidelity to his friend.

The second act begins with the appearance of Alberich, who comes to incite his son Hagen to further efforts to regain the ring. Siegfried appears, and announces the speedy arrival of Gunther and Brünnhilde. Hagen thereupon collects the vassals, and tells them the news of their lord's approaching marriage, which is received with unbounded delight. Brünnhilde's horror and amazement at finding Siegfried in the hall of the Gibichungs, wedded to Gutrune and with the ring so lately torn from her upon his finger, are profound. She accuses him of treachery, declaring that she is his real wife. Siegfried, for whom the past is a blank, protests his innocence, declaring that he has dealt righteously with Gunther and not laid hands upon his wife. Brünnhilde, however, convinces Gunther of Siegfried's deceit, and together with Hagen they agree upon his destruction.

The scene of the third act is laid in a forest on the banks of the Rhine. The three Rhine-maidens are disporting themselves in the river while they lament the loss of their beautiful treasure. Siegfried, who has strayed from his companions in the chase, now appears, and they beg him for the ring upon his finger, at first with playful banter, and afterwards in sober earnest, warning him that if he does not give it back to them he will perish that very day. He laughs at their womanly wiles, and they vanish as his comrades appear. After the midday halt, Siegfried tells Gunther and his vassals the story of his life. In the midst of his tale Hagen gives him a potion which restores his faded memory. He tells the whole story of his discovery of Brünnhilde, and his marriage with her, to the horror of Gunther. At the close of his tale two ravens, the birds of Wotan, fly over his head. He turns to look at them, and Hagen plunges his spear into his back. The vassals, in silent grief, raise the dead body upon their shields, and carry it back to the castle through the moonlit forest, to the immortal strains of the Funeral March.

At the castle Gutrune is anxiously waiting for news of her husband. Hagen tells her that he has been slain by a boar. The corpse is brought in and set down in the middle of the hall, amidst the wild lamentations of the widowed Gutrune. Hagen claims the ring, and stabs Gunther, who tries to prevent his taking it; but as he grasps at it, Siegfried's hand is raised threateningly, and Hagen sinks back abashed. Brünnhilde now comes in, sorrowful but calm. She understands the whole story of Siegfried's unwitting treachery, and has pardoned him in his death. She thrusts the weeping Gutrune aside, claiming for herself the sole right of a wife's tears. The vassals build a funeral pyre, and place the body of Siegfried upon it. Brünnhilde takes the ring from his finger, and with her own hand fires the wood. She then leaps upon her horse Grane, and with one bound rides into the towering flames. The Rhine, which has overflowed its banks, now invades the hall. Hagen dashes into the flood in search of the ring, but the Rhine-maidens have been before him. Flosshilde, who has rescued the ring from the ashes of the pyre, holds it exultantly aloft, while Wellgunde and Woglinde drag Hagen down to the depths. Meanwhile a ruddy glow has overspread the heavens behind. Valhalla is burning, and the gods in calm resignation await their final annihilation. The old order yields, giving place to the new. The ancient heaven, sapped by the lust of gold, has crumbled, and a new world, founded upon self-sacrificing love, rises from its ashes to usher in the era of freedom.

'Götterdämmerung' is prevented by its portentous length from ever becoming popular to the same extent as Wagner's other works, but it contains some of the noblest music he ever wrote. The final scene, for sublimity of conception and grandeur of execution, remains unequalled in the whole series of his writings. It fitly gathers together the many threads of that vast fabric, 'Der Ring der Nibelungen.' Saint Saëns says of it that 'from the elevation of the last act of



"Götterdämmerung," the whole work appears, in its almost supernatural grandeur, like the chain of the Alps seen from the summit of Mont Blanc.'

The literature of 'Der Ring des Nibelungen' is already very large, and not a year passes without some addition to the long catalogue of works dealing with Wagner's mighty drama. Readers desirous of studying the tetralogy more closely, whether from its literary, ethical, or musical side, must refer to one or more of the many handbooks devoted to its elucidation for criticism on a more elaborate scale than is possible within the narrow limits of such a work as the present.

It has already been related how Wagner broke off, when midway through 'Der Ring des Nibelungen,' and devoted himself to the composition of a work of more conventional dimensions. The latter was 'Tristan und Isolde.' Produced as it was in 1865, four years before 'Das Rheingold,' it was the first of Wagner's later works actually to see the light. Round its devoted head, therefore, the war of controversy raged more fiercely than in the case of any of Wagner's subsequent works. Those days are long past, and 'Tristan' is now universally accepted as a work of supreme musical loveliness, although the lack of exciting incident in the story must always prevent the *profanum vulgus* from sharing the musician's rapture over the deathless beauties of the score.

Isolde, the daughter of the King of Ireland, is sought in marriage by Marke, the King of Cornwall, and Tristan, his nephew, has been sent to bring the princess to England. Before the beginning of the drama Tristan had slain Morold, Isolde's lover, and sent his head to Ireland in place of the tribute due from Cornwall. He himself had been wounded in the fight, and when washed by the tide upon the shores of Ireland, had been tended by Isolde. To conceal his identity he assumed the name of Tantris, but Isolde had recognised him by a notch in his sword, which corresponded with a splinter which she had found imbedded in Morold's head. Finding the murderer of her lover in her power, her first impulse had been to slay him, but as she lifted the sword she found that love had conquered hate, and she let Tristan depart unscathed. When he returned as the ambassador of his uncle, her love changed to indignation that he who had won her heart should dare to woo her for another. The scene of the first act is laid on board the vessel which is conveying her to Cornwall. She vows never to become the bride of Marke, and opening a casket of magic vials, bids Brangäne, her attendant, pour one which contains a deadly poison into a goblet. Then she summons Tristan from his place at the helm, and bids him share the draught with her. Tristan gladly obeys, for he loves Isolde passionately, and prefers death to a life of hopeless yearning. But Brangäne has substituted a love philtre for the poison, and the lovers, instead of the pangs of death, feel themselves over-mastered by an irresistible wave of passion. As the shouts of the sailors announce the arrival of the ship, Tristan and Isolde meet in a long embrace.

The second act is practically one vast love duet. Isolde is waiting in the castle garden, listening to the distant horns of the King's hunting-party, and longing for the approach of night, when she may meet her lover. In spite of the entreaties of Brangäne, she extinguishes the torch which is to be the signal to Tristan, and soon she is in his arms. In a tender embrace they sink down among the flowers of the garden, murmuring their passion in strains of enchanting loveliness. Brangäne's warning voice falls upon unheeding ears. The King, followed by his attendants, rushes in, and overwhelmed with sorrow and shame, reproaches his nephew for his treachery. Tristan can only answer by calling upon Isolde to follow him to death, whereupon Melot, one of the King's men, rushes forward, crying treason, and stabs him in the breast.

In the last act Tristan is lying wounded and unconscious in his castle in Brittany, tended by Kurwenal, his faithful squire. He is roused by the news of Isolde's approach, and as her ship comes in sight he rises from his couch and in wild delirium tears the bandages from his wounds. Isolde rushes in in time to receive his parting sigh. As she bends over his lifeless body, another ship is seen approaching. It is the King, come not to chide but to pardon. Kurwenal, however, does not know this, and defends his master's castle with the last drop of his blood, dying at last at Tristan's feet, while Isolde chants her death-song over the fallen hero in strains of celestial loveliness.

'Tristan und Isolde' is the 'Romeo and Juliet' of music. Never has the poetry and tragedy of love

been set to music of such resistless beauty. But love, though the guiding theme of the work, is not the only passion that reigns in its pages. The haughty splendour of Isolde's injured pride in the first act, the beautiful devotion of the faithful Kurwenal, and the blank despair of the dying Tristan, in the third, are depicted with a magical touch.

Some years ago it was the fashion, among the more uncompromising adherents of Wagner, to speak of 'Tristan und Isolde' as the completest exposition of their master's theories, because the chorus took practically no share in the development of the drama. Many musicians, on the other hand, have felt Wagner's wilful avoidance of the possibilities of choral effect to detract seriously from the musical interest of the opera, and for that reason have found 'Tristan und Isolde' less satisfying as a work of art than 'Parsifal' or 'Die Meistersinger,' in which the chorus takes its proper place. It is scarcely necessary to point out that, opera being in the first instance founded upon pure convention, there is nothing more illogical in the judicious employment of the chorus than in the substitution of song for speech, which is the essence of the art-form.

Wagner's one comic opera was born under a lucky star. Most of his operas had to wait many years for production, but the kindly care of Ludwig of Bavaria secured the performance of 'Die Meistersinger' a few months after the last note had been written. Unlike many of his other masterpieces, too, 'Die Meistersinger' (1868) was a success from the first. There were critics, it is true, who thought the opera 'a monstrous caterwauling,' but it had not to wait long for general appreciation, and performances in Berlin, Vienna, and Dresden soon followed the initial one at Munich.

The scene of 'Die Meistersinger' is laid in sixteenth-century Nuremberg. Walthervon Stolzing, a young Franconian knight, loves Eva, the daughter of Pogner the goldsmith; but Pogner has made up his mind that Eva shall marry none but a Mastersinger, that is to say, a member of the guild devoted to the cultivation of music and poetry, for which the town was famous. Eva, on the contrary, is determined to marry no one but Walther, and tells him so in a stolen interview after service in St Catherine's Church. It remains therefore for Walther to qualify as a master, and David, the apprentice of Hans Sachs the cobbler, the most popular man in Nuremberg, is bidden by his sweetheart Magdalena, Eva's servant, to instruct the young knight in the hundred and one rules which beset the singer's art. The list of technicalities which David rattles off fills Walther with dismay, and he makes up his mind to trust to his native inspiration. The Mastersingers now assemble, and Pogner announces that Eva's hand is to be the prize of the singing contest next day. Walther now steps forward as a candidate for admission to the guild. First he must sing a trial song, and Beckmesser, the malicious little ape of a town-clerk, is appointed marker, to sit in a curtained box and note down upon a slate every violation of the rules of singing which may occur in the candidate's song. Walther sings from his heart of love and spring. The untutored loveliness of his song fills the hide-bound Mastersingers with dismay, and Beckmesser's slate is soon covered. Walther, angry and defeated, rushes out in despair, and the assembly breaks up in confusion. Only the genial Hans Sachs finds truth and beauty in the song, and cautions his colleagues against hasty judgment.

The scene of the second act is laid at a delightfully picturesque street-corner. Sachs is musing before his shop-door when Eva comes to find out how Walther had fared before the Mastersingers. Hans tells her of his discomfiture, and, by purposely belittling Walther's claims to musicianship, discovers what he had before suspected, that she loves the young knight. Sachs loves Eva himself, but finding out the state of her affections, nobly determines to help her to win the man of her heart. Walther now comes to meet his love, and, full of resentment against the Masters, proposes an elopement. Eva readily agrees, but Sachs, who has overheard them, frustrates the scheme by opening his window and throwing a strong light upon the street by which they would have to pass. Beckmesser, lute in hand, now comes down the street and begins a serenade under Eva's window. Sachs drowns his feeble piping with a lusty carol, hammering away meanwhile at a pair of shoes which he must finish that night for Beckmesser to wear on the morrow. Beckmesser is in despair. Finally they come to an arrangement. Beckmesser shall sing his song, and Sachs shall act as 'marker,' noting every technical blunder in the words and tune with a stroke of his

hammer. The result is such a din as disturbs the slumbers of the neighbours. David, the apprentice, comes out and recognises his sweetheart Magdalena at Eva's window. He scents a rival in Beckmesser, and begins lustily to cudgel the unfortunate musician. Soon the street fills with townsfolk and apprentices, all crying and shouting together. Eva and Walther, under cover of the uproar, are making their escape, when Sachs, who has been on the watch, steps out and stops them. He bids Eva go home, and takes Walther with him into the house. Suddenly the watchman's horn is heard in the distance. Every one rushes off, and the street is left to the quiet moonlight and the quaint old watchman, who paces up the street solemnly proclaiming the eleventh hour.

In the third act we find Sachs alone in his room, reading an ancient tome, and brooding over the follies of mankind. David interrupts him with congratulations on his birthday, and sings a choral in his honour. Walther now appears, full of a wonderful dream he has had. Sachs makes him sing it, and writes down the words on a piece of paper. After they have gone out, Beckmesser creeps in, very lame and sore after his cudgelling. He finds the paper and appropriates it. Sachs comes in and discovers the theft, but tells Beckmesser he may keep the poem. The latter is overjoyed at getting hold of a new song, as he supposes, by Sachs, and hurries off to learn it in time for the contest. Eva now comes in under the pretence of something being amiss with one of her shoes, and, while Sachs is setting it right, Walther sings her the last verse of his dream-song. The scene culminates in an exquisite quintet in which David and Magdalena join, after which they all go off to the festivities in a meadow outside the town. There, after much dancing and merry-making, the singing contest comes off. Beckmesser tries to sing Walther's words to the melody of his own serenade, the result being such indescribable balderdash that the assembled populace hoots him down, and he rushes off in confusion, Walther's turn then comes, and he sings his song with such success that the prize is awarded to him with acclamation. He wins his bride, but he will have nothing to say to the Mastersingers and their pedantry, until Hans Sachs has shown him that in them lies the future of German art.

Although it contains comic and even farcical scenes, 'Die Meistersinger' is in fact not so much a comedy as a satire, with a vein of wise and tender sentiment running through it. It has also to a certain extent the interest of autobiography. It is not difficult to read in the story of Walther's struggles against the prejudice and pedantry of the Mastersingers a suggestion of Wagner's own life-history, and if Beckmesser represents the narrow malice of critics who are themselves composers—and these were always Wagner's bitterest enemies—Sachs may stand for the enlightened public, which was the first to appreciate the nobility of the composer's aim. It is not surprising that 'Die Meistersinger' was one of the first of Wagner's mature works to win general appreciation. The exquisite songs, some of them easily detachable from their context, scattered lavishly throughout the work, together with the important share of the music allotted to the chorus, constitute a striking contrast to 'Tristan und Isolde' or 'Der Ring des Nibelungen.' It has been suggested that this was due to a half-unconscious desire on Wagner's part to write music which should appeal more to the popular ear than was possible in 'Tristan und Isolde.' One of the most striking features of the opera is the mastery with which Wagner has caught and reproduced the atmosphere of sixteenth-century Nuremberg without sacrificing a jot of the absolute modernity of his style. 'Die Meistersinger' yields to none of the composer's work in the complexity and elaboration of the score—indeed, the prelude may be quoted as a specimen of Wagner's command of all the secrets of polyphony at its strongest and greatest.

'Parsifal,' Wagner's last and in the opinion of many his greatest work, was produced in 1882 at the Festspielhaus in Bayreuth. The name by which the composer designated his work, *Bühnenweihfestspiel* which may be translated 'Sacred Festival Drama,' sufficiently indicates its solemn import, and indeed both in subject and treatment it stands remote from ordinary theatrical standards. The subject of 'Parsifal' is drawn from the legends of the Holy Grail, which had already furnished Wagner with the tale of 'Lohengrin.' Titurel, the earthly keeper of the Holy Grail, has built the castle of Monsalvat, and there established a community of stainless knights to guard the sacred chalice, who in their office are miraculously sustained by its life-giving power. Growing old, he has delegated his headship to his son Amfortas. Near to the castle of Monsalvat dwells the

magician Klingsor, who, having in vain solicited entry to that pure company, is now devoted to the destruction of the knights. He has transformed the desert into a garden of wicked loveliness, peopled by beautiful sirens, through whose charms many of the knights have already fallen from their state of good. Lastly Amfortas, sallying forth in the pride of his heart to subdue the sorcerer, armed with the sacred spear that clove the Saviour's side, has succumbed to the charms of the beauteous Kundry, a strange being over whom Klingsor exercises an hypnotic power. He has lost the spear, and further has sustained a grievous wound from its point dealt by Klingsor, which no balm or balsam can heal.

The first scene opens in a cool woodland glade near the castle of Monsalvat, where Gurnemanz, one of the knights, and two young esquires of the Grail are sleeping. Their earnest converse is interrupted by Kundry, who flies in with a healing medicine for the wounded King, which she has brought from Arabia. This strange woman is that Herodias who laughed at our Saviour upon the Cross, and thenceforth was condemned to wander through the world under a curse of laughter, praying only for the gift of tears to release her weary soul. Klingsor has gained a magic power over her, and, to use the language of modern theosophy, can summon her astral shape at will to be the queen of his enchanted garden, leaving her body stark and lifeless; but when not in his power she serves the ministers of the Grail in a wild, petulant, yet not wholly unloving manner. Gurnemanz tells the young esquires the story of the Grail, and together they repeat the prophecy which promises relief to their suffering King:—

Wise through pity,  
The sinless fool.  
Look thou for him  
Whom I have chosen.

Their words are interrupted by loud cries from without, and several knights and esquires rush in, dragging with them Parsifal, who has slain one of the sacred swans with his bow and arrow. Gurnemanz protects Parsifal from their violence, and seeing that the youth, who has lived all his life in the woods, is as innocent as a child, leads him up to the castle of the Grail, in the hope that he may turn out to be the sinless fool of the prophecy. In the vast hall of the Grail the knights assemble, and fulfil the mystic rites of the love-feast. Amfortas, the one sinner in that chaste community, pleads to be allowed to forgo his task of uncovering the Grail, the source to him of heartburning remorse and anguish; but Titurel, speaking from the tomb where he lies between life and death, sustained only by the miraculous power of the Grail, urges his son to the duty. Amfortas uncovers the Grail, which is illumined with unearthly light, and the solemn ceremony closes in peace and brotherly love. Parsifal, who has watched the whole scene from the side, feels a strange pang of sympathy at Amfortas's passionate cry, but as yet he does not understand what it means. He is not yet 'wise through pity,' and Gurnemanz, disappointed, turns him from the temple door.

In the second act we are in Klingsor's magic castle. The sorcerer, knowing of the approach of Parsifal, summons Kundry to her task, and with many sighs she has to submit to her master. Parsifal vanquishes the knights who guard the castle, and enters the enchanted garden, a wilderness of tropical flowers, vast in size and garish in colour. There he is saluted by troops of lovely maidens, who play around him until dismissed by a voice sounding from a network of flowers hard by. Parsifal turns and sees Kundry, now a woman of exquisite loveliness, advancing towards him. She tells him of his dead mother, and drawing him towards her, presses upon his lips the first kiss of love. The touch of defilement awakens him to a sense of human frailty. The wounded Amfortas's cry becomes plain to him. He starts to his feet, throbbing with compassion for a world of sin. No thought of sensual pleasure moves him. He puts Kundry from him, and her endearments move him but to pity and horror. Kundry in her discomfiture cries to Klingsor. He appears on the castle steps, brandishing the sacred spear. He hurls it at Parsifal, but it stops in the air over the boy's head. He seizes it and with it makes the sacred sign of the Cross. With a crash the enchanted garden and castle fall into ruin. The ground is strewn with withered flowers, among which Kundry lies prostrate, and all that a moment before was bright with exotic beauty now lies a bare and desert waste.

Many years have passed before the third act opens. Evil days have fallen upon the brotherhood of the Grail. Amfortas, in his craving for the release of death, has ceased to uncover the Grail. Robbed of their miraculous nourishment, the knights are sunk in dejection. Titurel is dead, and Gurnemanz dwells in a little hermitage in a remote part of the Grail domain. There one morning he finds the body of Kundry cold and stiff. He chafes her to life once more, and is surprised to see in her face and gestures a new and strange humility. A warrior now approaches clad in black armour. It is Parsifal returned at length after long and weary wanderings. Gurnemanz recognises the spear which he carries, and salutes its bearer as the new guardian of the Grail. He pours water from the sacred spring upon Parsifal's head, saluting him in token of anointment, while Kundry washes his feet and wipes them with her hair. The first act of Parsifal in his new office is to baptize the regenerate Kundry, redeemed at length by love from her perpetual curse. Bowing her head upon the earth, she weeps tears of repentant joy. The three now proceed to the temple, where the knights are gathered for Titurel's burial. Amfortas still obstinately refuses to uncover the Grail, and calls upon the knights to slay him. Parsifal heals his wound with a touch of the sacred spear, and taking his place, unveils the sacred chalice, and kneels before it in silent prayer. Once more a sacred glow illumines the Grail, and while Parsifal gently waves the mystic cup from side to side, in token of benediction alike to the pardoned Amfortas and the ransomed Kundry, a snowy dove flies down from above, and hovers over his anointed head.

It would be in vain to attempt to treat, within the restricted limits of these pages, of the manifold beauties of 'Parsifal,' musical, poetical, and scenical. Many books have already been devoted to it alone, and to these the reader must be referred for a subtler analysis of this extraordinary work. It is difficult to compare 'Parsifal' with any of Wagner's previous works. By reason of its subject it stands apart, and performed as it is at Bayreuth and there, save for sacrilegious New York, alone, with the utmost splendour of mounting, interpreted by artists devoted heart and soul to its cause, and listened to by an audience of the elect assembled from the four corners of the earth, 'Parsifal,' so to speak, is as yet surrounded by a halo of almost unearthly splendour. It is difficult to apply to it the ordinary canons of criticism. One thing however, may safely be said, that it stands alone among works written for theatrical performance by reason of its absolute modernity coupled with a mystic fervour such as music has not known since the days of Palestrina.

Of Wagner's work as a whole it is as yet too early to speak with certainty. The beauty of his works, and the value of the system upon which they are founded, must still be to a certain extent a matter of individual taste. One thing, at any rate, may safely be said: he has altered the whole course of modern opera. It is inconceivable that a work should now be written without traces more or less important of the musical system founded and developed by Richard Wagner.

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# CHAPTER XI

## MODERN FRANCE

GOUNOD—THOMAS—BIZET—SAINT SAËNS—REYER—MASSENET—BRUNEAU—CHARPENTIER—  
DEBUSSY

If one were set upon paradox, it would not be far from the truth to say that up to the middle of the nineteenth century the most famous French composers had been either German or Italian. Certainly if Lulli, Gluck, Rossini and Meyerbeer—to name only a few of the distinguished aliens who settled in Paris—had never existed, French opera of the present day would be a very different thing from what it actually is. Yet in spite of the strangely diverse personalities of the men who had most influence in shaping its destiny, modern French opera is an entity remarkable for completeness and homogeneity, fully alive to tendencies the most advanced, yet firmly founded upon the solid traditions of the past.

Gounod (1818-1893) was trained in the school of Meyerbeer, but his own sympathies drew him rather towards the serene perfection of Mozart. The pure influence of that mighty master, combined with the strange mingling of sensuousness and mysticism which was the distinguishing trait of his own character, produced a musical personality of high intrinsic interest, and historically of great importance to the development of music. If not the actual founder of modern French opera, Gounod is at least the source of its most pronounced characteristics.

His first opera, 'Sapho' (1851), a graceful version of the immortal story of the Lesbian poetess's love and death, has never been really popular, but it is interesting as containing the germs of much that afterwards became characteristic in Gounod's style. In the final scene of Sappho's suicide, the young composer surpassed himself, and struck a note of sensuous melancholy which was new to French opera. 'La Nonne Sanglante' (1854), his next work, was a failure; but in 'Le Médecin malgré lui' (1858), an operatic version of Molière's comedy, he scored a success. This is a charming little work, instinct with a delicate flavour of antiquity, but lacking in comic power. It has often been played in England as 'The Mock Doctor.' Sganarelle is a drunken woodcutter, who is in the habit of beating his wife Martine. She is on the look-out for a chance of paying him back in his own coin. Two servants of Géronte, the Croesus of the neighbourhood, appear in search of a doctor to cure their master's daughter Lucinde, who pretends to be dumb in order to avoid a marriage she dislikes. Martine sends them to the place where her husband is at work, telling them that they will find him an able doctor. She adds that he has one peculiarity, namely, that he will not own to his profession unless he is soundly thrashed. Under the convincing arguments of the two men, Sganarelle admits that he is a doctor, and follows them to their master's house. Léandre, Lucinde's lover, persuades Sganarelle to smuggle him into the house as an apothecary. The two young people with Sganarelle's help contrive an elopement, but when the marriage is discovered, Géronte visits his wrath upon the mock doctor, and is only pacified by the news that Léandre has just inherited a fortune.

The year 1859 saw the production of 'Faust,' the opera with which Gounod's name is principally associated. The libretto, by MM. Barbier and Carré does not of course claim to represent Goethe's play in any way. The authors had little pretension to literary skill, but they knew their business thoroughly. They fastened upon the episode of Gretchen, and threw all the rest overboard. The result was a well-constructed and thoroughly comprehensible libretto, with plenty of love-making and floods of cheap sentiment, but as different in atmosphere and suggestion from Goethe's mighty drama as could well be imagined.

The first act shows us Faust as an old man, sitting in his study weary and disappointed. He is about to end his troubles and uncertainty in death, when an Easter hymn sung in the distance by a chorus of villagers seems to bid him stay his hand. With a quick revulsion of feeling he calls on the

powers below, and, rather to his surprise, Mephistopheles promptly appears. In exchange for his soul, the devil offers him youth, beauty, and love, and, as an earnest of what is to come, shows him a vision of the gentle Margaret sitting at her spinning wheel. Faust is enraptured, hastily signs the contract, and hurries away with his attendant fiend.

The next act is taken up with a Kermesse in the market-place of a country town. Valentine, the brother of Margaret, departs for the wars, after confiding his sister to the care of his friend Siebel. During a pause in the dances Faust salutes Margaret for the first time as she returns from church. The third act takes place in Margaret's garden. Faust and Mephistopheles enter secretly, and deposit a casket of jewels upon the doorstep. Margaret, woman-like, is won by their beauty, and cannot resist putting them on. Faust finds her thus adorned, and woos her passionately, while Mephistopheles undertakes to keep Dame Martha, her companion, out of the way. The act ends by Margaret yielding to Faust's prayers and entreaties. In the fourth act Margaret is left disconsolate. Faust has deserted her, and Valentine comes home to find his sister's love-affair the scandal of the town. He fights a duel with Faust, whom he finds lurking under his sister's window, and dies cursing Margaret with his last breath. During this act occurs the church scene, which is sometimes performed after Valentine's death and sometimes before it. Margaret is kneeling in the shadowy minster, striving to pray, but the voice of conscience stifles her half-formed utterances. In Gounod's libretto, the intangible reproaches which Margaret addresses to herself are materialised in the form of Mephistopheles, a proceeding which is both meaningless and inartistic, though perhaps dramatically unavoidable. In the 'last act, after a short scene on the Brocken and a conventional ballet, which are rarely performed in England, we are taken to the prison where Margaret lies condemned to death for the murder of her child. Faust is introduced by the aid of Mephistopheles, and tries to persuade her to fly with him. Weak and wandering though she is, she refuses, and dies to the chant of an angelic choir, while Faust is dragged down to the abyss by Mephistopheles. Gounod's music struggles nobly with the tawdriness and sentimentality of the libretto. A good deal of the first and last acts is commonplace and conventional, but the other three contain beauties of a high order. The life and gaiety of the Kermesse scene in the second act, the sonorous dignity of Valentine's invocation of the cross, and the tender grace of Faust's salutation—the last a passage which might have been written by Mozart—are too familiar to need more than a passing reference. In the fourth act also there is much noble music. Gounod may be forgiven even for the soldiers' chorus, in consideration of the masculine vigour of the duel terzetto—a purified reminiscence of Meyerbeer—and the impressive church scene. But the most characteristic part of the work is, after all, the love music in the third act. The dreamy languor which pervades the scene, the cloying sweetness of the harmonies, the melting beauty of the orchestration, all combine to produce an effect; which was at that time entirely new to opera, and had no little share in forming the modern school. With all his admiration of Mozart, Gounod possessed little of his idol's genius for characterisation. The types in 'Faust' do not stand out clearly. Margaret, for instance, is merely a sentimental school-girl; she has none of the girlish freshness and innocence of Goethe's Gretchen, and Mephistopheles is much more of a tavern bully than a fallen angel. Yet with all its faults 'Faust' remains a work of a high order of beauty. Every page of the score tells of a striving after a lofty ideal, and though as regards actual form Gounod made no attempt to break new ground, the aim and atmosphere of 'Faust,' no less than the details of its construction, contrast so strongly with the conventional Italianism of the day, that it may well be regarded as the inauguration of a new era in French music.

'Faust' marks the zenith of Gounod's career. After 1859 he was content for the most part merely to repeat the ideas already expressed in his *chef-d'oeuvre*, while in his later works show a distinctly retrograde movement. He seems to have known nothing of the inward impulse of development which led Wagner and Verdi from strength to strength.

*Philémon et Baucis* (1860) is a charming modernisation of a classical legend. Jupiter and Vulcan, visiting earth for the purpose of punishing the impiety of the Phrygians, are driven by a storm to take refuge in the cottage of an aged couple, Philémon and Baucis. Pleased with the hospitable treatment which he receives at their hands, and touched by the mutual affection of the



old people, which time has done nothing to impair, Jupiter restores their lost youth to them. This leads to dangerous complications. The rejuvenated Baucis is so exceedingly attractive that Jupiter himself falls a victim to her charms, and Philémon becomes jealous and quarrelsome. Baucis finally persuades Jupiter to promise her whatever she wishes, and having extorted the oath compels him to return to Olympus, leaving Philémon and herself to enjoy another lifetime of uninterrupted happiness. 'Philémon et Baucis' adheres strictly to the conventional lines of opéra comique, and has little beyond its tuneful grace and delicate orchestration to recommend it. Nevertheless it is a charming trifle, and has survived many of Gounod's more pretentious works. 'La Reine de Saba' (1862) and 'La Colombe' (1866) are now forgotten, but 'Mireille' (1864), one of the composer's most delightful works, still enjoys a high degree of popularity. The story, which is founded upon Mistral's Provençal romance 'Miréio,' is transparently simple. Vincent, a young basket-maker, loves the fair Mireille, who is the daughter of a rich farmer named Raymond. Raymond will have nothing to say to so humble a suitor, and favours the pretensions of Ourrias, a herdsman. While making a pilgrimage to a church in the desert of Crau, Mireille has a sunstroke, and her life is despaired of. In an access of grief and remorse her father promises to revoke his dismissal of Vincent, whereupon Mireille speedily recovers and is united to her lover. Gounod's music seems to have borrowed the warm colouring of the Provençal poet's romance. 'Mireille' glows with the life and sunlight of the south. There is little attempt at dramatic force in it, and the one scene in which the note of pathos is attempted is perhaps the least successful in the whole opera. But the lighter portions of the work are irresistible. 'Mireille' has much of the charm of Daudet's Provençal stories, the charm of warmth and colour, independent of subject. More than one version of the opera exists. That which is now most usually played is in three acts. In the first version of the work there is a curious scene, in which Ourrias is drowned by a spectral ferryman in the waters of the Rhone, but this is now rarely performed.

In 1869 was produced 'Roméo et Juliette,' an opera which, in the estimation of the majority of Gounod's admirers, ranks next to 'Faust' in the catalogue of his works. The libretto, apart from one or two concessions to operatic convention, is a fair piece of work, and at any rate compares favourably with the parodies of Shakespeare which so often do duty for libretti. The opening scene shows the ball in Capulet's house and the first meeting of the lovers. The second act is the balcony scene. The third includes the marriage of Romeo and Juliet in Friar Laurence's cell, with the duels in the streets of Verona, the death of Mercutio, and the banishment of Romeo. The fourth act opens with the parting of the lovers in Juliet's chamber, and ends with Friar Laurence giving Juliet the potion. The last act, after an elaborate orchestral movement describing the sleep of Juliet, takes place in the tomb of the Capulets. MM. Barbier and Carré could not resist an opportunity of improving upon Shakespeare, and prolonged Romeo's death agony, in order to enable him to join in a final duet with Juliet.

The composer of the third act of 'Faust' could hardly fail to be attracted by 'Romeo and Juliet.' Nevertheless Gounod was too pronounced a mannerist to do justice to Shakespeare's immortal love-story. He is, of all modern composers, the one whose method varies least, and throughout 'Roméo et Juliette' he does little more than repeal in an attenuated form the ideas already used in 'Faust.' Yet there are passages in the opera which stand out in salient contrast to the monotony of the whole, such as the exquisite setting of Juliet's speech in the balcony scene, beginning—

'Thou knowest the mask of night is on my face,'

which conveys something more than an echo of the virginal innocence and complete self-abandonment of Shakespeare's lines, or the more commonplace but still beautiful passage at the close of the act; suggested by Romeo's line—

'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes.'

The duel scene is vigorous and effective, and the song allotted to Romeo's page—an impertinent insertion of the librettists—is intrinsically delightful. It is typical of the musician that he should put

forth his full powers in the chamber duet, while he actually omits the potion scene altogether, which is the legitimate climax of the act. In the original version of the opera there was a commonplace cavatina allotted to Juliet at this point, set to words which had but a remote connection with Shakespeare's immortal lines, but it was so completely unworthy of the situation that it was usually omitted, and when the opera was revised for production at the Grand Opéra in 1888, Gounod thought it wiser to end the act with the Friar's discourse to Juliet, rather than attempt once more to do justice to a scene which he knew to be beyond his powers. The last act is perhaps the weakest part of the opera. MM. Barbier and Carré's version of Shakespeare's magnificent poetry is certainly not inspiring; but in any case it is difficult to believe that Gounod's suave talent could have done justice to the piteous tragedy of that terrible scene. Gounod's last three operas did not add to his reputation. 'Cinq Mars' (1877) made little impression when it was first produced, but it has recently been performed by the Carl Rosa Company in English with some success. The libretto is a poor one. It deals in conventional fashion with the conspiracy of Cinq Mars against Richelieu, but the incidents are not well arranged and the characters are the merest shadows. Much of the music is tuneful and attractive, though cast in a stiff and old-fashioned form, and the masque music in the second act is as fresh and melodious as anything Gounod ever wrote. In 'Polyeucte' (1878) he attempted a style of severe simplicity in fancied keeping with Corneille's tragedy. There are some noble pages in the work, but as a whole it is distressingly dull, and 'Le Tribut de Zamora' (1881) was also an emphatic failure.

Gounod's later works, as has already been pointed out, show a distinct falling off from the standard attained in 'Faust,' as regards form as well as in ideas. As he grew older he showed a stronger inclination to return to obsolete models. 'Le Tribut de Zamora' reproduces the type of opera which was popular in the days of Meyerbeer. It is cut up into airs and recitatives, and the accompaniment is sedulously subordinated to the voices. Without desiring to discredit the beauties of 'Mireille' or 'Roméo et Juliette,' one cannot help thinking that it would have been better for Gounod's reputation if he had written nothing for the stage after 'Faust.'

Very soon after its production Gounod's masterpiece began to exert a potent influence upon his contemporaries. One of the first French composers to admit its power was Ambroise Thomas (1811-1896). Thomas was an older man than Gounod, and had already written much for the stage without achieving any very decisive success. He was a man of plastic mind, and was too apt to reproduce in his own music the form and even the ideas which happened to be popular at the time he wrote. Most of his early works are redolent of Auber or Halévy. Gounod's influence acted upon him like a charm, and in 'Mignon' (1866) he produced a work which, if not strictly original, has an element of personality too distinctive to be ignored.

If we can dismiss all thoughts of Goethe and his 'Wilhelm Meister' from our minds, it will be possible to pronounce MM. Barbier and Carré's libretto a creditable piece of work. Mignon is a child who was stolen in infancy by a band of gipsies. She travels with them from town to town, dancing in the streets to the delight of the crowd. One day in a German city she refuses to dance, and Jarno the gipsy chief threatens her with his whip. Wilhelm Meister, who happens to be passing, saves her from a beating, and, pitying the half-starved child, buys her from the gipsies. Among the spectators of this scene are Laertes, the manager of a troupe of strolling players, and Philine, his leading lady. Philine is an accomplished coquette, and determines to subjugate Wilhelm. In this she easily succeeds, and he joins the company as poet, proceeding with them to the Castle of Rosenberg, where a grand performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is to be given. Mignon, at her earnest request, accompanies him, disguised as a page. While at the castle Mignon is distracted by Wilhelm's infatuation for Philine, and when Wilhelm, prompted by Philine, tries to dismiss her, she puts on her old gipsy clothes and rushes away. Outside the walls of the castle she meets with an old half-witted harper, Lothario, who soothes the passion of her grief. In a moment of jealous fury at the thought of Philine she utters a wish that the castle were in flames. Lothario hears her words and proves his devotion by setting fire to the theatre while the performance is in progress. Mignon had been sent by Philine to fetch her bouquet from the green-room. The fire breaks out while the unfortunate girl is in the building, and she is given up for lost, but is saved by

Wilhelm. The last act takes place in Italy. Mignon's devotion has won Willielm's heart, and the opera ends by the discovery that she is the long-lost daughter of Lothario, who is actually the Count of Cipriani, but after the disappearance of his daughter had lost his reason, and wandered forth in the guise of a harper to search for her. The score of 'Mignon' reveals the hand of a sensitive and refined artist upon every page. It has no claims to greatness, and few to real originality, but it is full of graceful melody, and is put together with a complete knowledge of stage effect.

Thomas's 'Hamlet' (1868) is accepted as a masterpiece in Paris, where the absurdities of the libretto are either ignored or condoned. In England Shakespeare's tragedy is fortunately so familiar that such a ridiculous parody of it as MM. Barbier and Carré's libretto has not been found enduring. Much of Thomas's music is grandiose rather than grand, but in the less exacting scenes there is not a little of the plaintive charm of 'Mignon,' Ophelia's mad scene, which occupies most of the last act, is dramatically ludicrous, but the music is brilliant and captivating, and the ghost scene, earlier in the opera, is powerful and effective. Thomas employs several charming old Scandinavian tunes in the course of the work, which give a clever tinge of local colour to the score.

With Bizet (1838-1875), the influence of Wagner is felt in French music for the first time. 'Les Pêcheurs de Perles' (1863), his first work, follows traditional models pretty closely for the most part, and though containing music of charm and originality, does not, of course, represent Bizet's genius in its most characteristic aspects. It tells the story of the love of two Cingalese pearl-fishers for the priestess Leila. There are only three characters in the piece, and very little incident. The score owes a good deal to Félicien David's 'Le Désert,' but there is a dramatic force about several scenes which foreshadows the power and variety of 'Carmen.' 'La Jolie Fille de Perth' (1867), is to a great extent a tribute to the powerful influence of Verdi. It is a tuneful and effective work, but cannot be called an advance on 'Les Pêcheurs de Perles,' In 'Djamileh' (1872), we find the real Bizet for the first time. The story tells of the salvation of a world-weary youth, who is won back to life by the love and devotion of his slave. It is a clever study in Oriental colour, but has little dramatic value, though it was thought very advanced at the time of its production. In 1875, the year of Bizet's death, 'Carmen' was produced. The libretto is founded upon Mérimée's famous novel. Carmen, a sensual and passionate gipsy girl, is arrested for stabbing one of her comrades in a cigarette manufactory at Seville. She exercises all her powers of fascination upon the soldier, José by name, who is told off to guard her, and succeeds in persuading him to connive at her escape. For this offence he is imprisoned for a month, but Carmen contrives to communicate with him in gaol, and at the expiration of his sentence he meets her once more in an inn at the outskirts of the town. The passionate animalism of the gipsy completely captivates him, and forgetting Micaëla, the country damsel to whom he is betrothed, he yields himself entirely to Carmen's fascinations. He quarrels with one of his officers about her, and to escape punishment flies with Carmen to join a band of smugglers in the mountains. Carmen's capricious affection for José soon dies out, and she transfers her allegiance to the bull-fighter Escamillo, who follows her to the smugglers' lair, and is nearly killed by the infuriated José. Micaëla also finds her way up to the camp, and persuades José to go home with her and tend the last moments of his dying mother. The last act takes place outside the Plaza de Toros at Seville. José has returned to plead once more with Carmen, but her love has grown cold and she rejects him disdainfully. After a scene of bitter recrimination he kills her, while the shouts of the people inside the arena acclaim the triumph of Escamillo. 'Carmen' was coldly received at first. Its passionate force was miscalled brutality, and the suspicion of German influence which Bizet's clever use of guiding themes excited, was in itself enough to alienate the sympathies of the average Frenchman in the early seventies. Since its production 'Carmen' has gradually advanced in general estimation, and is now one of the most popular operas in the modern repertory. It is unnecessary to do more than allude to its many beauties, the nervous energy of the more declamatory parts, the brilliant and expressive orchestration, the extraordinarily clever use of Spanish rhythms, and the finished musicianship displayed upon every page of the score. The catalogue of Bizet's works is completed by 'Don Procopio,' an imitation of Italian opera buffa dating from his student days in Rome. It was unearthed and produced at Monte Carlo in 1906. It is a bright and lively little work, but has no pretensions to original value. Bizet's early death

deprived the French school of one of its brightest ornaments. To him is largely due the development of opéra comique which has taken place within the last twenty years, a development which has taken it almost to the confines of grand opera.

Jacques Offenbach (1819-1880), though German by birth, may fitly be mentioned here, since the greater part of his life was spent in Paris, and his music was more typically French than that of any of his Gallic rivals. His innumerable opéras bouffes scarcely come within the scope of this work, but his posthumous opéra comique, 'Les Contes d'Hoffman' (1881), is decidedly more ambitious in scope, and still holds the stage by virtue of its piquant melody and clever musicianship. In Germany, where 'Les Contes d' Hoffmann' is still very popular under the name of 'Hoffmann's Erzählungen,' it is usually performed in a revised version, which differs considerably from the French original as regards plot and dialogue, though the music is practically the same. Hoffmann, the famous story-teller, is the hero of the opera, which, after a prologue in a typically German beer-cellar, follows his adventures through three scenes, each founded upon one of his famous tales. In the first we see him fascinated by the mechanical doll Olympia, in the second he is at the feet of the Venetian courtesan Giulietta, while in the third we assist at his futile endeavours to save the youthful singer Antonia from the clutches of the mysterious Dr. Miracle.

The career of César Franck (1822-1890), offers a striking contrast to that of his famous contemporary Gounod. Fame came betimes to Gounod. While he was still a young man his reputation was European. He wrote his masterpiece at forty, and lived on its success for the remaining thirty years of his life. Since his death his fame has sadly shrunk, and even 'Faust' is beginning to 'date' unmistakably. The name of César Franck, on the other hand, until his death was hardly known beyond a narrow circle of pupils, but during the last fifteen years his reputation has advanced by leaps and bounds. At the present moment there is hardly a musician in Paris who would not call him the greatest French composer—he was a Belgian by birth, but what of that?—of the nineteenth century. His fame was won in the concert-room rather than in the theatre, but the day may yet come when his 'Hulda' will be a familiar work to opera-goers. It was produced in 1894 at Monte Carlo, but, in spite of the deep impression which it created, has not yet been heard in Paris. The action passes in Norway in the times of the Vikings. Hulda is carried off by a band of marauders, whose chief she is compelled to wed. She loves Eyolf, another Viking, and persuades him to murder her husband. After a time he proves faithless to her, whereupon she kills him and throws herself into the sea. This gloomy tale is illustrated by music of extraordinary power and beauty. Although Franck only avails himself of guiding themes to a limited extent, in mastery of the polyphonic style his work will compare with Wagner's most elaborate scores. In fact, the opulence of orchestral resource and the virility of inspiration displayed in 'Hulda' strikingly recall the beauties of 'Tristan und Isolde.' 'Ghiselle,' a work left unfinished by the composer and completed by several of his pupils, was produced in 1896 at Monte Carlo. Although by no means upon the same level as 'Hulda,' 'Ghiselle' also contains much fine music, and will doubtless be heard of again.

Léo Delibes (1836-1891) made no pretensions to the dignity and solidity of César Franck's style. He shone principally in ballet-music, but 'Lakmé' (1883), his best-known opera, is a work of much charm and tenderness. It tells the story of a Hindoo damsel who loves an English officer. Her father, a priest, discovering the state of her affections, tries to assassinate the Englishman, but Lakmé saves his life, and conveys him to a place of concealment in the jungle. There she finds that his heart is set upon a beautiful English 'miss,' and, in despair, poisons herself with the flowers of the Datura. Delibes's music never rises to passion, but it is unfailingly tender and graceful, and is scored with consummate dexterity. He has a pretty feeling too for local colour, and the scene in Lakmé's garden is full of a dreamy sensuous charm. 'Le Roi l'a dit' (1873) is a dainty little work upon an old French subject, as graceful and fragile as a piece of Sèvres porcelain. 'Kassya,' which the composer left unfinished, was orchestrated by Massenet, and produced in 1893. In this work Delibes attempted a tragic story to which his delicate talent was ill suited, and the opera achieved little success. Delibes is a typically French musician. Slight as his works often are, the exquisite skill of the workmanship saves them from triviality. He made no pretensions to advanced views, and though he occasionally trifles with guiding themes, the interest of his works rests almost

entirely upon his dainty vein of melody and the finish of his orchestration.

With Delibes may be classed Ferdinand Poise (1828-1892), a composer who made a speciality of operas founded upon the comedies of Molière and his contemporaries, and Ernest Guiraud (1837-1892), whose 'Piccolino' (1876) is one of the daintiest of modern comic operas. His 'Frédégonde,' produced in Paris in 1895, proved emphatically that his talent did not lie in the direction of grand opera. Edouard Lalo (1823-1892), a composer of no little charm and resource, owes his fame chiefly to 'Le Roi d'Ys,' which was successfully produced at the Opéra Comique in 1888, and was played in London in 1901. It is a gloomy story, founded upon a Breton legend. Margared and Rozenn, the two daughters of the King of Ys, both love the warrior Mylio, but Mylio's heart is given to Rozenn. The slighted Margared in revenge betrays her father's city to Karnac, the defeated enemy of her country, giving him the keys of the sluices which protect the town from the sea. Karnac opens the sluices and the tide rushes in. The town and its people are on the point of being overwhelmed, when Margared, stricken by remorse, throws herself into the waters. St. Corentin, the patron saint of Ys, accepts the sacrifice, and the sea retires. 'Le Roi d'Ys' is an excellent specimen of the kind of opera which French composers of the second rank used to write before the sun of Wagner dawned upon their horizon. It is redolent of Meyerbeer and Gounod, and though some of the scenes are not without vigour, it is impossible to avoid feeling that in 'Le Roi d'Ys' Lalo was forcing a graceful and delicate talent into an uncongenial groove. He is at his best in the lighter parts of the work, such as the pretty scene of Rozenn's wedding, which is perfectly charming. Emmanuel Chabrier (1842-1894), after writing a comic opera of thoroughly Gallic verve and grace, 'Le Roi malgré lui,' announced himself as a staunch adherent of Wagner in the interesting but unequal 'Gwendoline,' which was performed at Brussels in 1886. Benjamin Godard (1849-1895), one of the most prolific of modern composers, won no theatrical success until the production of 'La Vivandière' (1895), an attractive work constructed upon conventional lines, in which the banality of the material employed is often redeemed by clever treatment. Emile Paladilhe won a brilliant success in 1886 with 'Patrie,' and among other meritorious composers of what may be called the pre-Wagnerian type are Victorin Joncières (1839-1903) and Thodéore Dubois.

Of living French composers Camille Saint Saëns is the unquestioned head, but he is known to fame principally by his successes in the concert-room. Many of his operas achieved only *succès d'estime*, though not one of them is without beauty of a high order. Over 'La Princesse Jaune' (1872) and 'Le Timbre d'Argent' (1877) there is no need to linger. 'Samson et Dalila,' his first work of importance, was produced at Weimar in 1877, but, in spite of its success there and in other German towns, did not find its way on to a Parisian stage until 1890. The libretto follows the Biblical narrative with tolerable fidelity. In the first act, Samson rouses the Israelites to arms, kills the Philistine leader and disperses their army. In the second he visits Dalila in the Vale of Sorek, tells her the secret of his strength, and is betrayed into the hands of the Philistines. The third act shows Samson, blind and in chains, grinding at a mill. The scene afterwards changes to the temple of Dagon, where a magnificent festival is in progress. Samson is summoned to make sport for the Philistine lords, and the act ends with the destruction of the temple, and the massacre of the Philistines. Saint Saëns is the Proteus of modern music, and his scores generally reveal the traces of many opposing influences. The earlier scenes of 'Samson et Dalila' are conceived in the spirit of oratorio, and the choral writing, which is unusually solid and dignified, often recalls the massive style of Handel. In the second act he exhausts the resources of modern passion and colour, and in the Philistine revels of the third act he makes brilliant and judicious use of Oriental rhythms and intervals. Guiding themes are used in the opera, but not to any important extent, and the construction of the score owes very little to Wagner. Yet though the main outlines of the work adhere somewhat closely to a type which is now no longer popular, there is little fear of 'Samson et Dalila' becoming old-fashioned. The exquisite melody with which it overflows, combined with the inimitable art of the orchestration, make it one of the most important and attractive works of the modern French school. 'Étienne Marcel' (1879) and 'Proserpine' (1887) must be classed among Saint Saëns's failures, but 'Henry VIII.' is a work of high interest, which, though produced so long ago as 1883, is still popular in Paris. The action of the piece begins at the time when Henry is first smitten with the charms of Anne Boleyn, who for his sake neglects her former admirer, Don

Gomez, the Spanish Ambassador. Negotiations regarding the King's divorce with Catherine of Aragon are set on foot, and, when the Pope refuses to sanction it, Henry proclaims England independent of the Roman Church, amidst the acclamations of the people. In the last act Anne is queen. Catherine, who is at the point of death, has in her possession a compromising letter from Anne to Don Gomez. Henry is devoured by jealousy, and comes, accompanied by Don Gomez, to try to obtain possession of the incriminating document. Anne comes also for the same purpose. This is the strongest scene in the opera. Henry, in order to incite Catherine to revenge, speaks to Anne in his tenderest tones, but the divorced queen rises to the occasion. Praying for strength to resist the temptation, she throws the letter into the fire and falls down dead.

Saint Saëns has treated this scene with uncommon variety and force, and indeed the whole opera is a masterly piece of writing. He uses guiding themes with more freedom than in 'Samson et Dalila,' but the general outline of 'Henry VIII.' is certainly not Wagnerian in type. The same may be said of 'Ascanio,' a work produced in 1890, with only partial success. 'Phryné,' which was given at the Opéra Comique in 1893, is on a much less elaborate scale. It is a musicianly little work, but in form follows the traditions of the older school of opéra comique with almost exaggerated fidelity. 'Les Barbares' (1901), a story of the Teutonic invasion of Gaul, did not enhance the composer's reputation. The plot is of a well-worn kind. Marcomir, the leader of the barbarian invaders, is subjugated by the charms of the priestess Floria, who, after the requisite amount of hesitation, falls duly into his arms. Finally Marcomir is stabbed by Livia, whose husband he had killed in battle. Saint Saëns's music is admirable from the point of view of workmanship, but it is singularly devoid of anything like inspiration. 'Les Barbares' was received with all the respect due to a work from the pen of the leading musician of modern France, but it would be useless to pretend that it is likely to keep its place in the current repertory.

'Hélène' (1904) is a more favourable example of Saint Saëns's many-sided talent. The libretto, which is the work of the composer himself, deals with the flight of Helen and Paris from Sparta, and the greater part of the one act of which the opera consists is devoted to an impassioned duet between the lovers. The apparitions of Venus and Pallas, the one urging Helen upon her purposed flight, the other dissuading her from it, give variety to the action, but the work as a whole lacks dramatic intensity, though it rises to a climax of some power. Saint Saëns's music is interesting and musicianly from first to last. Like Berlioz in his 'Prise de Troie' he has plainly gone to Gluck for his inspiration, and in its sobriety and breadth of design no less than in its classic dignity of melody and orchestration, his music often recalls the style of the mighty composer of 'Alceste.'

Saint Saëns's latest opera, 'L'Ancêtre' (1906), has not added materially to his reputation. It is a gloomy and, to tell the truth, somewhat conventional story of a Corsican vendetta. The instrumental part of the work is treated in masterly fashion, but the opera as a whole met with little favour at its production at Monte Carlo, and it has not been performed elsewhere.

Saint Saëns's theory of opera has been to combine song, declamation, and symphony in equal proportions, and thus, though he has written works which cannot fail to charm, he seems often to have fallen foul of both camps in the world of music. The Wagnerians object to the set form of his works, and the reactionaries condemn the prominence which he often gives to the declamatory and symphonic portions of his score. He is by nature a thorough eclectic, and his works possess a deep interest for musicians, but it may be doubted whether, in opera at any rate, a more masterful personality is not necessary to produce work of really permanent value.

To Ernest Reyer success came late. The beauties of his early works, 'Érostrate' (1852) and 'La Statue' (1861), were well known to musicians; but not until the production of 'Sigurd' in 1884 did he gain the ear of the public. Sigurd is the same person as Siegfried, and the plot of Reyer's opera is drawn from the same source as that of 'Götterdämmerung.' Hilda, the youthful sister of Gunther, the king of the Burgundians, loves the hero Sigurd, and at the instigation of her nurse gives him a magic potion, which brings him to her feet. Sigurd, Gunther, and Hagen then swear fealty to each other and start for Iceland, where Brunehild lies asleep upon a lofty rock, surrounded by a circle of fire. There Sigurd, to earn the hand of Hilda, passes through the flames and wins Brunehild for

Gunther. His face is closely hidden by his visor, and Brunehild in all innocence accepts Gunther as her saviour, and gives herself to him. The secret is afterwards disclosed by Hilda in a fit of jealous rage, whereupon Brunehild releases Sigurd from the enchantment of the potion. He recognises her as the bride ordained for him by the gods, but before he can taste his new-found happiness he is treacherously slain by Hagen, while by a mysterious sympathy Brunehild dies from the same stroke that has killed her lover. Although not produced until 1884, 'Sigurd' was written long before the first performance of 'Götterdämmerung,' but in any case no suspicion of plagiarism can attach to Reyer's choice of Wagner's subject. There is very little except the subject common to the two works. 'Sigurd' is a work of no little power and beauty, but it is conceived upon a totally different plan from that followed in Wagner's later works. Reyer uses guiding themes, often with admirable effect, but they do not form the foundation of his system. Vigorous and brilliant as his orchestral writing is, it is generally kept in subservience to the voices, and though in the more declamatory parts of the opera he writes with the utmost freedom, he has a lurking affection for four-bar rhythm, and many of the songs are conveniently detachable from the score. 'Sigurd' is animated throughout by a loftiness of design worthy of the sincerest praise. Reyer's melodic inspiration is not always of the highest, but he rarely sinks below a standard of dignified efficiency. In 'Salammbô,' a setting of Flaubert's famous romance which was produced at Brussels in 1890, he did not repeat the success of 'Sigurd.' 'Salammbô' is put together in a workmanlike way, but there is little genuine inspiration in the score. The local colour is not very effectively managed, and altogether the work is lacking in those qualities of brilliancy and picturesqueness which Flaubert's Carthaginian story seems to demand.

Reyer and Saint Saëns both show traces of the influence of Wagner, but though guiding themes are often employed with excellent effect in their works, the general outlines of their operas remain very much in accordance with the form handed down by Meyerbeer. Massenet, on the other hand, has drunk more deeply at the Bayreuth fountain. His early comic operas, 'La Grand' Tante' (1867) and 'Don César de Bazan' (1872) are purely French in inspiration, and even 'Le Roi de Lahore' (1877), his first great success, does not show any very important traces of German influence. Its success was largely due to the brilliant spectacle of the Indian Paradise in the third act. The score is rich in sensuous melody of the type which we associate principally with the name of Gounod, and the subtle beauties of the orchestration bear witness to the hand of a master.

In 'Hérodiade' (1881) the influence of Wagner becomes more noticeable, though it hardly amounts to more than an occasional trifling with guiding themes. The libretto is a version of the Biblical story of St. John the Baptist, considerably doctored to suit Parisian taste. When 'Hérodiade' was performed in London in 1904, under the title of 'Salome,' the names of some of the characters were altered and the scene of the story was transferred to Ethiopia, in order to satisfy the conscientious scruples of the Lord Chamberlain. Thus according to the newest version of Massenet's opera 'Jean' is a mysterious prophet—presumably a species of Mahdi—who makes his appearance at the court of Moriame, King of Ethiopia. He denounces the sins of Queen Hesatoade in no measured terms, but the latter cannot induce her husband to avenge her wrongs, since Moriame dare not venture for political reasons to proceed to extreme measures against so popular a character as Jean. Jean has an ardent disciple in Salome, a young lady whose position in Ethiopian society is not very clearly defined by the librettist, though in the end she turns out to be Hesatoade's long-lost daughter. Jean's regard for Salome is purely Platonic, but Moriame loves her passionately, and when he finds out that Jean is his rival he promptly orders him to prison where he is put to death after a passionate scene with Salome, who kills herself in despair. Massenet has taken full advantage of the passionate and voluptuous scenes of the libretto, which lend themselves well to his peculiar style. In certain scenes his treatment of guiding themes reaches an almost symphonic level, and the opera is throughout a singularly favourable specimen of his earlier manner. He has recently revised the score, and added a scene between the Queen and a Chaldean soothsayer, which is one of the most powerful in the opera.

'Manon,' which was first performed in 1884, shows perhaps no advance in the matter of form upon 'Hérodiade,' but the subject of the opera is so admirably suited to Massenet's tender and

delicate talent that it remains one of his most completely successful works. The Abbé Prévost's famous romance had already been treated operatically by Auber, but his 'Manon Lescaut' was never really a success, and had been laid upon the shelf many years before Massenet took the story in hand.

The action of Massenet's opera begins in the courtyard of an inn at Amiens, where the Chevalier des Grieux happens to fall in with Manon Lescaut, who is being sent to a convent under the charge of her brother, a bibulous guardsman. Manon does not at all like the prospect of convent life, and eagerly agrees to Des Grieux's proposal to elope with him to Paris. The next act shows them in an apartment in Paris. Des Grieux has tried in vain to obtain his father's consent to his marriage, and the capricious Manon, finding that the modest style of their *ménage* hardly agrees with her ideas of comfort, listens to the advances made to her by a nobleman named Brétigny, and ends by conniving at a scheme, planned by the elder Des Grieux, for carrying off his son from his questionable surroundings. In the next act Manon is the mistress of Brétigny, feted and admired by all. During an entertainment at Cours-la-Reine, she overhears a conversation between Brétigny and the Count des Grieux, and learns from the latter that his son is a novice at Saint Sulpice. Seized by a sudden return of her old love, she hastens away to the seminary, and after a passionate interview persuades Des Grieux to come back once more to her arms. In the next act Manon beguiles Des Grieux to a gambling-house, where he quarrels with Guillot, one of her numerous admirers. The latter revenges himself by denouncing the place to the police, who effect a successful raid upon it and carry off Manon to St. Lazare. The last scene takes place upon the road to Havre. Manon, who is condemned to transportation, is passing by with a gang of criminals. Lescaut persuades the sergeant in charge to allow her an interview with Des Grieux. She is already exhausted by ill-treatment and fatigue, and dies in his arms. Massenet's dainty score reproduces the spirit of the eighteenth century with rare felicity. A note of genuine passion, too, is not wanting, and an ingenious use of guiding themes binds the score together into a harmonious whole. A novelty in its arrangement is the plan of an orchestral accompaniment to the dialogue. Æsthetically this is perhaps hardly defensible, but in several scenes—notably that of Cours-la-Reine, in which Manon's agitated interview with the Count stands out in forcible relief against the graceful background formed by a minuet heard in the distance—the result is completely successful. 'Le Cid' (1885) and 'Le Mage' (1891), two works produced at the Paris Opera, may be passed over as comparative failures, but 'Esclarmonde' (1889) marks an important stage in Massenet's career. The libretto is drawn from an old French romance. Esclarmonde, the Princess of Byzantium, who is a powerful enchantress, loves Roland, the French knight, and commands her minion spirits to guide him to a distant island, whither she transports herself every night to enjoy his company. He betrays the secret of their love, and thereby loses Esclarmonde, but by his victory in a tournament at Byzantium he regains her once more.

Massenet's music is a happy combination of Wagner's elaborate system of guiding themes with the sensuous beauty of which he himself possesses the secret. As regards the plan of 'Esclarmonde' his indebtedness to Wagner was so patent, that Parisian critics christened him 'Mlle. Wagner,' but nevertheless he succeeded in preserving his own individuality distinct from German influence. No one could mistake 'Esclarmonde' for the work of a German; in melodic structure and orchestral colouring it is French to the core.

'Werther' was written in 1886, though not actually produced until 1892, when it was given for the first time at Vienna. The plot of Goethe's famous novel is a rather slight foundation for a libretto, but the authors did their work neatly and successfully. In the first act Werther sees Charlotte cutting bread and butter for her little brothers and sisters, and falls in love with her. In the second, Charlotte, now married to Albert, finding that she cannot forget Werther and his passion, sends him from her side. He departs in despair, meditating suicide. In the last act Charlotte is still brooding over the forbidden love, and will not be comforted by the artless prattle of her sister Sophie. Werther suddenly returns, and after a passionate and tearful scene, extorts from Charlotte the confession that she loves him. He then borrows Albert's pistols, and shoots himself in his lodgings, where Charlotte finds him, and he breathes his last sigh in her arms. Though in tone and sentiment



more akin to 'Manon,' in form 'Werther' resembles 'Esclarmonde.' It is constructed upon a basis of guiding themes, which are often employed with consummate skill. The uniform melancholy of the story makes the music slightly monotonous, and though the score cannot fail to delight musicians, it has hardly colour or variety enough to be generally popular. 'Le Portrait de Manon,' a delicate little sketch in one act, and 'Thaïs,' a clever setting of Anatole France's beautiful romance, both produced in 1894, will not be likely to add much to Massenet's reputation. 'La Navarraise,' produced during the same year in London, was apparently an attempt to imitate the melodramatic extravagance of Mascagni. The action takes place under the walls of Bilbao during the Carlist war. Anita loves Araquil, a Spanish soldier, but his father will not permit the marriage because of her poverty. Seeing that a reward is offered for the head of the Carlist general, Anita goes forth like a second Judith, trusting to her charms to win admittance to the hostile camp. She wins her reward, but Araquil, who is brought in from a battle mortally wounded, knowing the price at which it was won, thrusts her from him, and she sinks a gibbering maniac upon his corpse. There is little in Massenet's score but firing of cannons and beating of drums. The musical interest centres in a charming duet in the opening scene, and a delicious instrumental nocturne. The action of the piece is breathless and vivid, and the music scarcely pretends to do more than furnish a suitable accompaniment to it. Of late years Massenet has confined himself principally to works of slight calibre, which have been on the whole more successful than many of his earlier and more ambitious efforts. 'Sapho' (1897), an operatic version of Daudet's famous novel, and 'Cendrillon' (1899), a charming fantasia on the old theme of Cinderella, both succeeded in hitting Parisian taste. No less fortunate was 'Grisélidis' (1901), a quasi-mediæval musical comedy, founded upon the legend of Patient Grizel, and touching the verge of pantomime in the characters of a comic Devil and his shrewish spouse. Of Massenet's later works none has been more successful than 'Le Jongleur de Notre Dame' (1902), which, besides winning the favour of Paris, has been performed at Covent Garden and in many German towns with much success. Here we find Massenet in a very different vein from that of 'Manon,' or indeed any of his earlier works. The voluptuous passion of his accustomed style is exchanged for the mystic raptures of monasticism. Cupid has doffed his bow and arrows and donned the conventual cowl. 'Le Jongleur' is an operatic version of one of the prettiest stories in Anatole France's 'Etui de Nacre.' Jean the juggler is persuaded by the Prior of the Abbey of Cluny to give up his godless life and turn monk. He enters the monastery, but ere long is distressed to find that while his brethren prove their devotion to the Blessed Virgin by their skill in the arts of painting, music and the like, he can give no outward sign of the faith that is in him. At last he bethinks him of his old craft. He steals into the chapel and performs before the image of Our Lady the homely antics which in old days delighted the country people at many a village fair. He is discovered by the Prior, who is preparing to denounce the sacrilege when the image comes to life and bends down to bless the poor juggler who has sunk exhausted on the steps of the altar. The Prior bows in awe before this manifestation of divine graciousness and the juggler dies in the odour of sanctity. Massenet's music catches the spirit of the story with admirable art. As regards melodic invention it is rather thin, but the workmanship is beyond praise. The opening scene at the village fair is appropriately bright and gay, but the best music comes in the second act where the monks are gathered together in the convent hall, each busied over his particular task. Here occurs the gem of the work, the Legend of the Sage-bush, which is sung to the juggler-monk by his good friend the convent cook. Rarely has Massenet written anything more delightful than this exquisite song, so fresh in its artful simplicity, so fragrant with the charm of mediæval monasticism.

Mention must be made, for the sake of completeness, of the performance at Nice in 1903 of Massenet's thirty—year—old oratorio, 'Marie Magdeleine,' in the guise of a 'drame lyrique.' French taste, it need hardly be said, is very different from English with regard to what should and should not be placed upon the stage, but once granted the permissibility of making Jesus Christ the protagonist of an opera, there is comparatively little in 'Marie Magdeleine' to offend religious susceptibilities. The work is divided into four scenes: a palm-girt well outside the city of Magdala, the house of Mary and Martha, Golgotha, and the garden of Joseph of Arimathea, where occurs what a noted French critic in writing about the first performance described as 'l'apparition très réussie de Jésus.'

In 'Chérubin' (1905) Massenet returned to his more familiar manner. The story pursues the adventures of Beaumarchais's too fascinating page after his disappearance from the scene of 'Le Mariage de Figaro.' What these adventures are it is needless to detail, save that they embrace a good deal of duelling and even more love-making. Massenet's music is as light as a feather. It ripples along in the daintiest fashion, sparkling with wit and gaiety, and if it leaves no very definite impression of originality, its craftsmanship is perfection itself. 'Ariane' (1906) is a far more serious affair. It is a return to the grander manner of 'Hérodiade' and 'Le Cid,' and proves conclusively that the musician's hand has not lost its cunning. Catulle Mendès's libretto is a clever embroidery of the world-old tale of Ariadne and Theseus, the figure of the gentle Ariadne being happily contrasted with that of the fiery and passionate Phædra, who succeeds her sister in the affections of the fickle Theseus. The death of Phædra, who is crushed by a statue of Adonis which she had insulted, is followed by a curious and striking scene in Hades, whither Ariadne descends in order to bring her sister back to the world of life. The opera, according to tradition, ends with the flight of Theseus and Phædra, while the deserted Ariadne finds death in the arms of the sirens, who tempt her to seek eternal rest in the depths of the sea. Massenet's music is conspicuous for anything rather than novelty of invention or treatment, but though he is content to tread well-worn paths, he does so with all his old grace and distinction of manner, and many of the scenes in 'Ariane' are treated with an uncommon degree of spirit and energy.

Massenet's latest work, 'Thérèse' (1907), is a return to the breathless, palpitating style of 'La Navarraise.' It is a story of the revolution, high-strung and emotional. Thérèse is the wife of the Girondin Thorel, who has bought the castle of Clerval, in the hope of eventually restoring it to its former owner, Armand de Clerval. Armand returns in disguise, on his way to join the Royalists in Vendée. He and Thérèse were boy-and-girl lovers in old days, and their old passion revives. Armand entreats her to fly with him, which after the usual conflict of emotions she consents to do. But meanwhile Thorel, who has been amiably harbouring the émigré, is arrested and dragged to the scaffold. This brings about a change in Thérèse's feelings. She sends Armand about his business and throws in her lot with Thorel, defying the mob and presumably sharing her husband's fate. Massenet's music is to a certain extent thrust into the background by the exciting incidents of the plot. The cries of the crowd, the songs of the soldiers and the roll of the drums leave but little space for musical development. Still 'Thérèse' contains many passages of charming melody and grace, though it will certainly not rank among the composer's masterpieces, Massenet is one of the most interesting of modern French musicians. On the one hand, he traces his musical descent from Gounod, whose sensuous charm he has inherited to the full; on the other he has proved himself more susceptible to the influence of Wagner than any other French composer of his generation. The combination is extremely piquant, and it says much for Massenet's individuality that he has contrived to blend such differing elements into a fabric of undeniable beauty.

Alfred Bruneau is a composer whose works have excited perhaps more discussion than those of any living French composer. By critics who pretend to advanced views he has been greeted as the rightful successor of Wagner, while the conservative party in music have not hesitated to stigmatise him as a wearisome impostor. 'Kérim' (1887), his first work, passed almost unnoticed. 'Le Rêve,' an adaptation of Zola's novel, was produced in 1891 at the Opéra Comique, and in the same year was performed in London. The scene is laid in a French cathedral city. The period is that of the present day.

Angélique, the adopted child of a couple of old embroiderers, is a dreamer of dreams. All day she pores over the lives of the saints until the legends of their miracles and martyrdoms become living realities to her mind, and she hears their voices speaking to her in the silence of her chamber. She falls in love with a man who is at work upon the stained glass of the Cathedral windows. This turns out to be the son of the Bishop. The course of their love does not run smooth. The Bishop, in spite of the protestations of his son, refuses his consent to their marriage. Angélique pines away, and is lying at the point of death when the Bishop relents, and with a kiss of reconciliation restores her to life. She is married to her lover, but in the porch of the Cathedral dies from excess of happiness. The entire work is rigorously constructed upon Wagner's system of

representative themes. Each act runs its course uninterruptedly without anything approaching a set piece. Two voices are rarely heard together, and then only in unison. So far Bruneau faithfully follows the system of Wagner. Where he differs from his master is in the result of his efforts; he has nothing of Wagner's feeling for melodic beauty, nothing of his mastery of orchestral resource, and very little of his musical skill. The melodies in 'Le Rêve'—save for an old French *chanson*, which is the gem of the work—are for the most part arid and inexpressive. Bruneau handles the orchestra like an amateur, and his attempts at polyphony are merely ridiculous. Yet in spite of all this, the vocal portions of the work follow the inflections of the human voice so faithfully as to convey a feeling of sincerity. Ugly and monotonous as much of 'Le Rêve' is, the music is alive. In its strange language it speaks with the accent of truth. Here at any rate are none of the worn-out formulas which have done duty for so many generations. In defence of Bruneau's work it may be urged that his dreary and featureless orchestration, so wholly lacking in colour and relief, may convey to some minds the cool grey atmosphere of the quiet old Cathedral town, and that much of the harshness and discordance of his score is, at all events, in keeping with the iron tyranny of the Bishop. 'Le Rêve' at any rate was not a work to be passed over in silence: it was intended to create discussion, and discussion it certainly created.

In 'L'Attaque du Moulin' (1893), another adaptation of Zola, Bruneau set himself a very different task. The contrast between the placid Cathedral close and the bloody terrors of the Franco-Prussian war was of the most startling description. 'L'Attaque du Moulin' opens with the festivities attendant upon the betrothal of Françoise, the miller's daughter, to Dominique, a young Fleming, who has taken up his quarters in the village. In the midst of the merry-making comes a drummer, who announces the declaration of war, and summons all the able-bodied men of the village to the frontier. In the second act, the dogs of war are loose. The French have been holding the mill against a detachment of Germans all day, but as night approaches they fall back upon the main body. Dominique, who is a famous marksman, has been helping to defend his future father-in-law's property. Scarcely have the French retired when a division of Germans appears in the courtyard of the mill. The captain notices that Dominique's hands are black with powder, and finding that, though a foreigner, he has been fighting for the French in defiance of the rules of war, orders him to be shot. By the help of Françoise, Dominique kills the sentinel who has been set to watch him, and escapes into the forest; but the German captain, suspecting that the miller and his daughter have had a hand in his escape, orders the old man to be shot in Dominique's place. Dominique creeps back in the grey dawn from the forest, and Françoise, torn by conflicting emotions, knows not whether she should wish him to stay and face his sentence or escape once more and leave her father to his fate. The miller determines to sacrifice himself for his daughter's lover, and by pretending that his sentence has been revoked induces Dominique to depart. The old man is shot by the Germans just as the French rush in triumphant with Dominique at their head.

'L'Attaque du Moulin' was received with more general favour than 'Le Rêve.' In it Bruneau shows an inclination to relax the stern principles of his former creed. The action is often interrupted by solos and duets of a type which approaches the conventional, though for the most part the opera follows the Wagnerian system. The result of this mixture of styles is unsatisfactory. 'L'Attaque du Moulin' has not the austere sincerity of 'Le Rêve,' and the attempts to bid for popular favour are not nearly popular enough to catch the general ear. Bruneau has little melodic inspiration, and when he tries to be tuneful he generally ends in being merely commonplace. The orchestral part of the opera, too, is far less satisfactory than in 'Le Rêve.' There, as has already been pointed out, the monotony and lack of colour were to a certain extent in keeping with the character of the work, but in 'L'Attaque du Moulin,' where all should be colour and variety, the dull and featureless orchestration is a serious blot. 'Messidor' (1897) and 'L'Ouragan' (1901) had very much the same reception as the composer's earlier operas. The compact little phalanx of his admirers greeted them with enthusiasm, but the general public remained cold. 'Messidor,' written to a prose libretto by Zola, is a curious mixture of socialism and symbolism. The foundation of the plot is a legend of the gold-bearing river Ariège, which is said to spring from a vast subterranean cathedral, where the infant Christ sits on his mother's lap playing with the sand which falls from his hands in streams of gold. Intertwined with this strange story is a tale of the conflict between a capitalist and the villagers

whom his gold-sifting machinery has ruined. There are some fine moments in the drama, but the allegorical element which plays so large a part in it makes neither for perspicacity nor for popularity. 'L'Ouragan' is a gloomy story of love, jealousy, and revenge. The scene is laid among the fisher-folk of a wild coast—presumably Brittany—where the passions of the inhabitants seem to rival the tempests of their storm-beaten shores in power and intensity. It contains music finely imagined and finely wrought, and it is impossible not to feel that if Bruneau's sheer power of invention were commensurate with his earnestness and dramatic feeling he would rank very high among contemporary composers. In 'L'Enfant Roi' (1905), a 'comédie lyrique' dealing with *bourgeois* life in modern Paris, which plainly owed a good deal to Charpentier's 'Louise,' the composer essayed a lighter style with no very conspicuous success, but his latest work, 'Naïs Micoulin' (1907), a Provençal tale of passion, revenge and devotion seems to contain more of the elements of lasting success.

Bruneau's later works can hardly be said to have fulfilled the promise of 'Le Rêve,' but they unquestionably show a fuller command of the resources of his art. He is a singular and striking figure in the world of modern music, and it is impossible to believe that he has spoken his last word as yet. His career will be watched with interest by all who are interested in the development of opera.

Of the younger men the most prominent are Vincent d'Indy, Gustave Charpentier, and Claude Debussy. Vincent d'Indy's 'Fervaa' was produced at Brussels in 1897 and was given in Paris shortly afterwards. It is a story of the Cevennes in heroic times, somewhat in the Wagnerian manner, and the music is defiantly Wagnerian from first to last. Clever as 'Fervaa' unquestionably is, it is valuable less as a work of art than as an indication of the real bent of the composer's talent. The dramatic parts of the opera suggest nothing but a brilliant exercise in the Wagnerian style, but in the lyrical scenes, such as the last act in its entirety, there are evidences of an individuality of conspicuous power and originality. 'L'Étranger' (1903) hardly bore out the promise of 'Fervaa,' in spite of much clever musicianship. The plot is an adaptation of the legend of the Flying Dutchman, and the unmitigated gloom of the work prevented it from winning the degree of favour to which its many merits entitled it. Gustave Charpentier's 'Louise,' produced in 1900, hit the taste of the Parisian public immediately and decisively. It tells the story of the loves of Louise, a Montmartre work-girl, and Julien, a poet of Bohemian tendencies. Louise's parents refuse their consent to the marriage, whereupon Louise quits her home and her work and follows Julien. Together they plunge into the whirl of Parisian life. Louise's mother appears, and persuades her daughter to come home and nurse her sick father. In the last act, the parents, having, as they think, snatched their child from destruction, do all in their power to keep her at home. At first she is resigned, but afterwards revolts, and the curtain falls as she rushes out to rejoin Julien with her father's curses ringing in her ears. The strongly marked Parisian flavour of the libretto ensured the success of 'Louise' in Paris, but the music counts for a good deal too. Charpentier owes much to Bruneau, but his music is more organic in quality, and his orchestration is infinitely superior. Nothing could be more brilliant than his translation into music of the sights and sounds of Parisian street life. The vocal parts of 'Louise' are often ugly and expressionless, but they are framed in an orchestral setting of curious alertness and vivacity. It remains to be seen how Charpentier's unquestionable talent will adapt itself to work of a wider scope than 'Louise.'

The fame of Claude Debussy is a plant of recent growth, and dates, so far as the general public is concerned, from the production of his 'Pelléas et Mélisande' in 1902, though for some years before he had been the idol of an intimate circle of adorers. 'Pelléas et Mélisande' is founded upon Maeterlinck's play of that name, the action of which it follows closely, but not closely enough, it seems, to please the poet, who publicly dissociated himself from the production of Debussy's opera and, metaphorically speaking, cursed it root and branch. Golaud, the son of King Arkel, wandering in the wood finds the damsel Mélisande sitting by a fountain. He falls in love with her and carries her back to the castle as his wife. At the castle dwells also Pelléas, Golaud's brother, whose growing love for Mélisande is traced through a succession of interviews. In the end, Golaud kills the lovers after a striking scene in which, as he stands beneath the window of the room in

which Pelléas and Mélisande have secretly met, he is told what is passing within by a child whom he holds in his arms. The story is of course merely that of Paolo and Francesca retold, but placed in very different surroundings and accompanied by music that certainly could never have been written by an Italian, of Dante's or any other time.

Debussy has aimed at creating a musical equivalent for the Maeterlinck 'atmosphere,' The score of 'Pelléas et Mélisande' is a pure piece of musical impressionism, an experiment in musical pioneering the value of which it is difficult to judge offhand. He has wilfully abjured melody of any accepted kind and harmony conforming to any established tradition. His music moves in a world of its own, a dream-world of neutral tints, shadowy figures, and spectral passions. The dreamy unreality of the tale is mirrored in the vague floating discords of the music, and whatever the critics may say the effect is singularly striking and persuasive. At present there are no rumours of a successor to 'Pelléas et Mélisande,' but whatever the future of Debussy may be, he at any rate deserves the credit of striking a note entirely new to the history of music.

There are many other living French composers who, if not destined to revolutionise the world of opera, have already done admirable work, and may yet win a more than local reputation. Charles Marie Widor has recently in 'Les Pêcheurs de Saint-Jean' (1905) given a worthy success to his twenty-year-old 'Maître Ambros.' Navier Leroux, a pupil of Massenet, has carried on his master's traditions, somewhat Wagnerised and generally speaking brought up to date, in 'Astarté' (1900), 'La Reine Fiammette' (1903), 'William Ratcliff' (1906), and 'Théodora' (1907). Remarkable promise has been shown by Paul Dukas in 'Ariane et Barbe-Bleue' (1907); by Camille d'Erlanger in 'Le Fils de l'Étoile' (1904) and 'Aphrodite' (1906); by Georges Marty in 'Daria' (1905); by Georges Hüe in 'Titania' (1903), and by Gabriel Dupont in 'La Cabrera' (1905), while a characteristic note of tender sentiment was struck by Reynaldo Hahn in 'La Carmélite' (1902).

André Messager's name is chiefly associated in England with work of a lighter character, but it must not be forgotten that he is the composer of two of the most charming opéras comiques of modern times, 'La Basoche' (1890) and 'Madame Chrysanthème' (1893).

This is perhaps the most convenient place to refer to the remarkable success recently achieved by the Flemish composer Jan Blockx, whose 'Herbergprinses,' originally produced at Antwerp in 1896, has been given in French as 'Princesse d'Auberge' in Brussels and many French towns. The heroine is a kind of Flemish Carmen, a wicked siren named Rita, who seduces the poet Merlyn from his bride, and after dragging him to the depths of infamy and despair, dies in the end by his hand. The music, though not without a touch of coarseness, overflows with life and energy, and one scene in particular, that of a Flemish Kermesse, is masterly in its judicious and convincing use of local colour. Jan Blockx's later works, 'Thyl Uylenspiegel' (1900), 'De Bruid van der Zee' (1901) and 'De Kapelle' (1903) do not appear to have met with equal success. Another Belgian composer, Paul Gilson, has of late won more than local fame by his 'Princesse Rayon de Soleil,' produced at Brussels in 1905.

In modern times the stream of opéra comique has divided into two channels. The first, as we have seen, under the guidance of such men as Bizet, Delibes, and Massenet, has approached so near to the confines of grand opera, that it is often difficult to draw the line between the two *genres*. The second, under the influence of Offenbach, Hervé, and Lecocq, has shrunk into opéra bouffe, a peculiarly Parisian product, which, though now for some reason under a cloud, has added sensibly to the gaiety of nations during the past thirty years. The productions of this school, though scarcely coming within the scope of the present work, are by no means to be despised from the merely musical point of view, and though the recent deaths of Audran, Planquette and other acknowledged masters of the *genre* have left serious gaps in the ranks of comic opera writers, there seems to be no valid reason for despairing of the future of so highly civilised and entertaining a form of musical art.

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# CHAPTER XII

## MODERN ITALY

VERDI—BOITO—PONCHIELLI—PUCCINI—MASCAGNI—LEONCAVALLO—GIORDANO

The death of Verdi occurred so recently that it is still possible to speak of him as representing the music of modern Italy in its noblest and most characteristic manifestation, but his life's record stretches back to a very dim antiquity. His first work, 'Oberto, Conte di San Bonifacio,' was performed in 1839, when 'Les Huguenots' was but three years old, and 'Der Fliegende Holländer' still unwritten. It is thoroughly and completely Italian in type, and, though belonging to a past age in the matter of form, contains the germs of those qualities which were afterwards to make Verdi so popular, the rough, almost brutal energy which contrasted so strongly with the vapid sweetness of Donizetti, and the vigorous vein of melody which throughout his career never failed him. Verdi's next work, a comic opera known alternatively as 'Un Giorno di Regno' and 'Il Finto Stanislao' (1840) was a failure. 'Nabucodonosor' (1842) and 'I Lombardi' (1843) established his reputation in his own country and won favour abroad; but the opera which gave him European fame was 'Ernani' (1844). The story is an adaptation of Victor Hugo's famous play. Elvira, the chosen bride of Don Silva, a Spanish grandee, loves Ernani, an exiled nobleman, who has had to take refuge in brigandage. Silva discovers their attachment, but being connected with Ernani in a plot against Charles V., he defers his vengeance for the moment. He yields his claim upon Elvira's affection, but exacts a promise from his rival, that when he demands it, Ernani shall be prepared to take his own life. Charles's magnanimity frustrates the conspiracy, and Silva, defeated alike in love and ambition, claims the fulfilment of Ernani's oath, despite the prayers of Elvira, who is condemned to see her lover stab himself in her presence. Hugo's melodrama suited Verdi's blood-and-thunder style exactly. 'Ernani' is crude and sensational, but its rough vigour never descends to weakness, though it often comes dangerously near to vulgarity. 'Ernani' is the opera most typical of Verdi's earliest period. With all its blemishes, it is easy to see how its masculine vigour and energy must have captivated the audiences of the day. But there were political as well as musical reasons for the instantaneous success of Verdi's early operas. Italy in the forties was a seething mass of sedition. Verdi's strenuous melodies, often allied to words in which the passionate patriotism of his countrymen contrived to read a political sentiment, struck like a trumpet-call upon the ears of men already ripe for revolt against the hated Austrian rule. Such strains as the famous 'O mia patria, si bella e perduta' in 'Nabucodonosor' proclaimed Verdi the Tyrtæus of awakened Italy.

'Ernani' was followed by a series of works which, for the sake of Verdi's reputation, it is better to pass over as briefly as possible. His success provided him with more engagements than he could conscientiously fulfil, and the quality of his work suffered in consequence. There are some fine scenes in 'I Due Foscari' (1844), but it has little of the vigour of 'Ernani.' 'Giovanna d'Arco' (1845), 'Alzira' (1845), and 'Attila' (1846), were almost total failures. In 'Macbeth' (1847), however, Verdi seems to have been inspired by his subject, and wrote better music than he had yet given to the world. The libretto is a miserable perversion of Shakespeare, and for that reason the opera has never succeeded in England, but in countries which can calmly contemplate a ballet of witches, or listen unmoved to Lady Macbeth trolling a drinking-song, it has had its day of success. 'Macbeth' is interesting to students of Verdi's development as the first work in which he shows signs of emerging from his *Sturm und Drang* period. There is some admirable declamatory music in it, which seems to foreshadow the style of 'Rigoletto,' and the sleep-walking scene, though old-fashioned in structure, is really impressive. After 'Macbeth' came another series of works which are now forgotten. Among them was 'I Masnadieri,' which was written for Her Majesty's Theatre in 1847. Although the principal part was sung by Jenny Lind, the work was a complete failure, and was pronounced by the critic Chorley to be the worst opera ever produced in England. Passing quickly by 'Il Corsaro' (1848), 'La Battaglia di Legnano' (1849), 'Luisa Miller' (1849) and 'Stiffelio' (1850), all of which have dropped completely out of the current repertory, we come to the brilliant

period in which Verdi produced in succession three works which, through all changes of taste and fashion, have manfully held their place in popular favour—'Rigoletto,' 'Il Trovatore,' and 'La Traviata.' 'Rigoletto' (1851) is founded upon Victor Hugo's drama, 'Le Roi s'amuse.' The *locale* of the story is changed, and the King of France becomes a Duke of Mantua, but otherwise the original scheme of the work remains unaltered. Rigoletto, the Duke's jester, has an only daughter, Gilda, whom he keeps closely immured in an out-of-the-way part of the city, to preserve her from the vicious influence of the court. The amorous Duke, however, has discovered her retreat, and won her heart in the disguise of a student. The courtiers, too, have found out that Rigoletto is in the habit of visiting a lady, and jumping to the conclusion that she is his mistress, determine to carry her off by night in order to pay the jester out for the bitter insults which he loves to heap upon them. Their plan succeeds, and Gilda is conveyed to the Palace. There she is found by her father, and to his horror she confesses that she loves the Duke. He determines to punish his daughter's seducer, and hires a bravo named Sparafucile to put him out of the way. This worthy beguiles the Duke, by means of the charms of his sister Maddalena, to a lonely inn on the banks of the river, promising to hand over his body to Rigoletto at midnight. Maddalena pleads tearfully for the life of her handsome lover, but Sparafucile is a man of honour, and will not break his contract with the jester. Rigoletto has paid for a body, and a body he must have. However, he consents, should any stranger visit the inn that night, to kill him in the Duke's place. Gilda, who is waiting in the street, hears this and makes up her mind to die instead of her lover. She enters the house, and is promptly murdered by Sparafucile. Her body, sewn up in a sack, is handed over at the appointed hour to Rigoletto. The jester, in triumph, is about to hurl the body into the river, when he hears the Duke singing in the distance. Overcome by a horrible suspicion, he opens the sack and is confronted by the body of his daughter.

The music of 'Rigoletto' is on a very different plane from that of 'Ernani.' Verdi had become uneasy in the fetters of the cavatina-cabaletta tradition—the slow movement followed by the quick—which, since the day of Rossini, had ruled Italian opera with a rod of iron. In 'Rigoletto,' although the old convention still survives, the composer shows a keen aspiration after a less trammelled method of expressing himself. Rigoletto's great monologue is a piece of declamation pure and simple, and as such struck a note till then unheard in Italy. The whole of the last act is a brilliant example of Verdi's picturesque power, combined with acute power of characterisation. The Duke's gay and lightsome *canzone*, the magnificent quartet, in which the different passions of four personages are contrasted and combined with such consummate art, and the sombre terrors of the tempest, touch a level of art which Verdi had not till then attained, nor was to reach again until the days of 'Aida,' twenty years later.

'Il Trovatore' (1853) is melodrama run mad. The plot is terribly confused, and much of it borders on the incomprehensible, but the outline of it is as follows. The mother of Azucena, a gipsy, has been burnt as a witch by order of the Count di Luna. In revenge Azucena steals one of his children, whom she brings up as her own son under the name of Manrico. Manrico loves Leonora, a lady of the Spanish Court, who is also beloved by his brother, the younger Count di Luna. After various incidents Manrico falls into the Count's hands, and is condemned to death. Leonora offers her hand as the price of his release, which the Count accepts. Manrico refuses liberty on these terms, and Leonora takes poison to escape the fulfilment of her promise.

The music of 'Il Trovatore' shows a sad falling off from the promise of 'Rigoletto.' Face to face with such a libretto, Verdi probably felt that refinement and characterisation were equally out of the question, and fell back on the coarseness of his earlier style. 'Il Trovatore' abounds with magnificent tunes, but they are slung together with very little feeling for appropriateness. There is a brutal energy about the work which has been its salvation, for of the higher qualities, which make a fitful appearance in 'Rigoletto,' there is hardly a trace.

'La Traviata' (1853) is an operatic version of Dumas's famous play, 'La Dame aux Camélias.' The sickly tale of the love and death of Marguerite Gauthier, here known as Violetta, is hardly an ideal subject for a libretto, and it says much for Verdi's versatility that, after his excursions into transpontine melodrama, he was able to treat 'drawing-room tragedy' with success. Alfredo



Germont loves Violetta, the courtesan, and establishes himself with her in a villa outside Paris. There his old father pays Violetta a visit, and, by representing that the matrimonial prospects of his daughter are injured by Violetta's connection with Alfredo, induces her to leave him. Alfredo is indignant at Violetta's supposed inconstancy, and insults her publicly at a ball in Paris. In the last act Violetta dies of consumption after an affecting reconciliation with her lover. The music of 'La Traviata' is in strong contrast to Verdi's previous work. The interest of Dumas's play is mainly psychological, and demands a delicacy of treatment which would have been thrown away upon the melodramatic subjects which Verdi had hitherto affected. Much of his music is really graceful and refined, but his efforts to avoid vulgarity occasionally land him in the slough of sentimentality. Nevertheless, the pathos which characterises some of the scenes has kept 'La Traviata' alive, though the opera is chiefly employed now as a means of allowing a popular prima donna to display her high notes and her diamonds.

'Les Vêpres Siciliennes,' which was produced in Paris in 1855, during the Universal Exhibition, only achieved a partial success, and 'Simon Boccanegra' (1857), even in the revised and partly rewritten form which was performed in 1881, has never been popular out of Italy. 'Un Ballo in Maschera' (1861), on the other hand, was for many years a great favourite in this country, and has recently been revived with remarkable success. The scene of the opera is laid in New England. Riccardo, the governor of Boston, loves Amelia, the wife of his secretary, Renato. After a scene in a fortune-teller's hut, in which Riccardo's death is predicted, the lovers meet in a desolate spot on the seashore. Thither also comes Renato, who has discovered a plot against his chief and hastens to warn him of his danger. In order to save Riccardo's life Renato resorts to the time-honoured device of an exchange of cloaks. Thus effectually disguised Riccardo makes his escape, leaving Amelia, also completely unrecognisable in a transparent gauze veil, in charge of her unsuspecting husband, who has promised to convey her home in safety. Enter the conspirators, who attack Renato; Amelia rushes between the combatants, and at the psychological moment her veil drops off. Tableau and curtain to a mocking chorus of the conspirators, which forms a sinister background to the anguish and despair of the betrayed husband and guilty wife. In the next act Renato joins forces with the conspirators, and in the last he murders Riccardo at the masked ball from which the opera takes its name. 'Un Ballo in Maschera' is one of the best operas of Verdi's middle period. Like 'Rigoletto' it abounds in sharp and striking contrasts of character, the gay and brilliant music of the page Oscar, in particular, forming an effective foil to the more tragic portions of the score. The same feeling for contrast is perceptible in 'La Forza del Destino,' in which the gloom of a most sanguinary plot is relieved by the humours of a vivandière and a comic priest. This work, which was produced at St. Petersburg in 1862, has never been popular out of Italy, and 'Don Carlos,' which was written for the Paris Exhibition of 1867, seems also to be practically laid upon the shelf. It tells of the love of Don Carlos for his stepmother, Elizabeth, the wife of Philip II. of Spain, and apart from the dulness of the libretto, has the faults of a work of transition. Verdi's earlier manner was beginning to lie heavily upon his shoulders, but he was not yet strong enough to sever his connection with the past. There are scenes in 'Don Carlos' which foreshadow the truth and freedom of 'Aida,' but their beauty is often marred by strange relapses into conventionality.

'Aida' (1871) was the result of a commission from Ismail Pacha, who wished to enhance the reputation of his new opera-house at Cairo by the production of a work upon an Egyptian subject from the pen of the most popular composer of the day. The idea of the libretto seems to have been originally due to Mariette Bey, the famous Egyptologist, who had happened to light upon the story in the course of his researches. It was first written in French prose by M. Camilla du Locle in collaboration with Verdi himself, and afterwards translated by Signor Ghislanzoni.

Aida, the daughter of Amonasro, the King of Ethiopia, has been taken prisoner by the Egyptians, and given as a slave to the princess Amneris. They both love the warrior Radames, the chosen chief of the Egyptian army, but he cares nothing for Amneris, and she vows a deadly vengeance against the slave who has supplanted her. Radames returns in triumph from the wars, bringing with him a chain of prisoners, among whom is Amonasro. The latter soon finds out Aida's influence over Radames, and half terrifies, half persuades her into promising to extract from her lover the secret

of the route which the Egyptian army will take on the morrow on their way to a new campaign against the Ethiopians. Aida beguiles Radames with seductive visions of happiness in her own country, and induces him to tell her the secret. Amonasro, who is on the watch, overhears it and escapes in triumph, while Radames, in despair at his own treachery, gives himself up to justice. Amneris offers him pardon if he will accept her love, but he refuses life without Aida, and is condemned to be immured in a vault beneath the temple of Phtha. There he finds Aida, who has discovered a means of getting in, and has made up her mind to die with her lover. They expire in each other's arms, while the solemn chant of the priestesses in the temple above mingles with the sighs of the heart-broken Amneris.

'Aida' was an immense advance upon Verdi's previous work. The Egyptian subject, so remote from the ordinary operatic groove, seems to have tempted him to a fresher and more vivid realism, and the possibilities of local colour opened a new world to so consummate a master of orchestration. The critics of the day at once accused Verdi of imitating Wagner, and certain passages undoubtedly suggest the influence of 'Lohengrin,' but as a whole the score is thoroughly and radically Italian. In 'Aida' Verdi's vein of melody is as rich as ever, but it is controlled by a keen artistic sense, which had never had full play before. For the first time in his career he discovered the true balance between singers and orchestra, and at once took his proper place among the great musicians of the world. Special attention must be directed to Verdi's use of local colour in 'Aida.' This is often a dangerous stumbling-block to musicians, but Verdi triumphed most where all the world had failed. In the scene of the consecration of Radames, he employs two genuine Oriental tunes with such consummate art that this scene is not only one of the few instances in the history of opera in which Oriental colour has been successfully employed, but, in the opinion of many, is the most beautiful part of the whole opera. Another magnificent scene is the judgment of Radames, in the fourth act, where an extraordinary effect is gained by the contrast of the solemn voices of the priests within the chamber with the passionate grief of Amneris upon the threshold. The love scene, in the third act, shows the lyrical side of Verdi's genius in its most voluptuous aspect. The picture of the palm-clad island of Philae and the dreaming bosom of the Nile is divinely mirrored in Verdi's score. The music seems to be steeped in the odorous charm of the warm southern night.

Sixteen years elapsed before the appearance of Verdi's next work. It was generally supposed that the aged composer had bidden farewell for ever to the turmoil and excitement of the theatre, and the interest excited by the announcement of a new opera from his pen was proportionately keen. The libretto of 'Otello' (1887), a masterly condensation of Shakespeare's tragedy, was from the pen of Arrigo Boito, himself a musician of no ordinary accomplishment. The action of the opera opens in Cyprus, amidst the fury of a tempest. Othello arrives fresh from a victory over the Turks, and is greeted enthusiastically by the people, who light a bonfire in his honour. Then follows the drinking scene. Cassio, plied by Iago, becomes intoxicated and fights with Montano. The duel is interrupted by the entrance of Othello, who degrades Cassio from his captaincy, and dismisses the people to their homes. The act ends with a duet of flawless loveliness between Othello and Desdemona, the words of which are ingeniously transplanted from Othello's great speech before the Senate. In the second act Iago advises Cassio to induce Desdemona to intercede for him, and, when left alone, pours forth a terrible confession of his unfaith in the famous 'Credo.' This, one of the few passages in the libretto not immediately derived from Shakespeare, is a triumph on Boito's part. The highest praise that can be given to it is to say, which is the literal truth, that it falls in no way beneath the poetical and dramatic standard of its context. Othello now enters, and Iago contrives to sow the first seeds of jealousy in his breast by calling his attention to Cassio's interview with Desdemona. Then follows a charming episode, another of Boito's interpolations, in which a band of Cypriotes bring flowers to Desdemona. Othello is won for the moment by the guileless charm of her manner, but his jealousy is revived by her assiduous pleading for Cassio. He thrusts her from him, and the handkerchief with which she offers to bind his brow is secured by Iago. Left with his chief, Iago fans the rising flame of jealousy, and the act ends with Othello's terrific appeal to Heaven for vengeance upon his wife. In the third act, after an interview of terrible irony and passion between Othello and Desdemona, in which he accuses her to her face of unchastity, and

laughs at her indignant denial. Cassio appears with the handkerchief which he has found in his chamber. Iago ingeniously contrives that Othello shall recognise it, and at the same time arranges that he shall only hear as much of the conversation as shall confirm him in his infatuation. Envoys from Venice arrive, bearing the order for Othello's recall and the appointment of Cassio in his place. Othello, mad with rage and jealousy, strikes Desdemona to the earth, and drives every one from the hall. Then his overtaxed brain reels, and he sinks swooning to the floor. The shouts of the people outside acclaim him as the lion of Venice, while Iago, his heel scornfully placed on Othello's unconscious breast, cries with ghastly malevolence, 'Ecco il Leone.' The last act follows Shakespeare very closely. Desdemona sings her Willow Song, and, as though conscious of approaching calamity, bids Emilia a pathetic farewell. Scarcely are her eyes closed in sleep, when Othello enters by a secret door, bent on his fell purpose. He wakes her with a kiss, and after a brief scene smothers her with a pillow. Emilia enters with the news of an attempt to assassinate Cassio. Finding Desdemona dead, she calls for help. Cassio, Montano, and others rush in; Iago's treachery is unmasked, and Othello in despair stabs himself, dying in a last kiss upon his dead wife's lips.

In 'Otello' Verdi advanced to undreamed-of heights of freedom and beauty. 'Aida' was a mighty step towards the light, but with 'Otello' he finally shook off the trammels of convention. His inexhaustible stream of melody remained as pure and full as ever, while the more declamatory parts of the opera, down to the slightest piece of recitative, are informed by a richness of suggestion, and an unerring instinct for truth, such as it would be vain to seek in his earlier work. Rich and picturesque as much of the orchestral writing is, the voice remains, as in his earlier works, the key-stone of the whole structure, and though motives are occasionally repeated with exquisite effect—as in the case of the 'Kiss' theme from the duet in the first act, which is heard again in Othello's death scene—Verdi makes no pretence at imitating Wagner's elaborate use of guiding themes. There is an artistic reason for this, apart from the radical difference between the German and Italian views of opera. In 'Otello' the action is rapid for the most part, and in many scenes the music only aims at furnishing a suitable accompaniment to the dialogue. A symphonic treatment of the orchestra, in such scenes as that between Iago and Othello in the second act, would tend to obscure the importance of the dialogue upon the stage, every word of which for the proper comprehension of the drama, must be forcibly impressed upon the listener's attention. In such a scene as the handkerchief trio, in which the situation remains practically the same for some time, a symphonic treatment of the orchestra is thoroughly in place, and here Verdi displays extraordinary skill in working out his theme, though even here his method has very little resemblance to that of Wagner.

Six years after 'Otello' came 'Falstaff,' produced in 1893, when Verdi was in his eightieth year. Boito's libretto is a cleverly abbreviated version of Shakespeare's 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' with the addition of two or three passages from 'Henry IV.' There are three acts, each of which is divided into two scenes. The first scene takes place in the Garter Inn at Windsor. Falstaff and his trusty followers, Bardolph and Pistol, discomfit Dr. Caius, who comes to complain of having been robbed. Falstaff then unfolds his scheme for replenishing his coffers through the aid of Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page, and bids his faithful esquires carry the famous duplicate letters to the comely dames. Honour, however intervenes, and they refuse the office. Falstaff then sends his page with the letters, pronounces his celebrated discourse upon honour, and hunts Bardolph and Pistol out of the house. In the second scene, we are in Ford's garden. The letters have arrived, and the merry wives eagerly compare notes and deliberate upon a plan for avenging themselves upon their elderly wooer. Dame Quickly is despatched to bid Falstaff to an interview. Meanwhile Nannetta Ford, the 'Sweet Anne Page' of Shakespeare, has contrived to gain a stolen interview with her lover Fenton, while the treacherous Bardolph and Pistol are telling Ford of their late master's designs on his wife's honour. Ford's jealousy is easily aroused, and he makes up his mind to carry the war into the enemy's country by visiting Falstaff in disguise. The second act takes us back to the Garter. Dame Quickly arrives with a message from Mrs. Ford. Falstaff is on fire at once, and agrees to pay her a visit between the hours of two and three. Ford now arrives, calling himself Master Brook, and paves his way with a present of wine and money. He tells Falstaff of his hopeless passion for a haughty dame of Windsor, Mrs. Alice Ford, begging the irresistible knight to

woo the lady, so that, once her pride is broken, he too may have a chance of winning her favour. Falstaff gladly agrees, and horrifies the unlucky Ford by confiding the news to him that he already has an assignation with the lady fixed for that very afternoon. The second scene is laid in a room in Ford's house. The merry wives are assembled, and soon Falstaff is descried approaching. Mrs. Ford entertains him for a few minutes, and then, according to their arrangement, Dame Quickly runs in to say that Mrs. Page is at the door. Falstaff hastily hides himself behind a large screen, but the jest changes to earnest when Mrs. Page herself rushes in to announce that Ford, mad with jealousy and rage, has raised the whole household and is really coming to look for his wife's lover. The women quickly slip Falstaff into a huge basket and cover him with dirty linen, while Nannetta and Fenton who have been indulging in another stolen interview slip behind the screen. Ford searches everywhere for Falstaff in vain, and is beginning to despair of finding him, when the sound of a kiss behind the screen arrests his attention. He approaches it cautiously, and thrusts it aside only to find his daughter in Fenton's arms. Meanwhile Mrs. Ford calls on her servants. Between them they manage to lift the gigantic basket, and, while she calls her husband to view the sight, carry it to the window and pitch it out bodily into the Thames. The first scene of the third act is devoted to hatching a new plot to humiliate the fat knight, and the second shows us a moonlit glade in Windsor Forest, whither he has been summoned by the agency of Dame Quickly. There all the characters assemble disguised as elves and fairies. They give Falstaff a *mauvais quart d'heure*, and end by convincing him that his amorous wiles are useless against the virtue of honest burghers' wives. Meanwhile Nannetta has induced her father, by means of a trick, to consent to her marriage with Fenton, and the act ends with a song of rejoicing in the shape of a magnificent fugue in which every one joins.

Perhaps the most extraordinary thing about 'Falstaff' is that it was written by a man eighty years old. It is the very incarnation of youth and high spirits. Verdi told an interviewer that he thoroughly enjoyed writing it, and one can well believe his words. He has combined a schoolboy's sense of fun with the grace and science of a Mozart. The part-writing is often exceedingly elaborate, but the most complicated concerted pieces flow on as naturally as a ballad. The glorious final fugue is an epitome of the work. It is really a marvel of contrapuntal ingenuity, yet it is so full of bewitching melody and healthy animal spirits that an uncultivated hearer would probably think it nothing but an ordinary jovial finale. In the last act Verdi strikes a deeper note. He has caught the charm and mystery of the sleeping forest with exquisite art. There is an unearthly beauty about this scene, which is new to students of Verdi. In the fairy music, too, he reveals yet another side of his genius. Nothing so delicate nor so rich in imaginative beauty has been written since the days of Weber.

It is impossible as yet to speak with any degree of certainty as to Verdi's probable influence upon posterity. With all his genius he was perhaps hardly the man to found a school. He was not, like his great contemporary Wagner, one of the world's great revolutionists. His genius lay not in overturning systems and in exploring paths hitherto untrodden, but in developing existing materials to the highest conceivable pitch of beauty and completeness. His music has nothing to do with theories, it is the voice of nature speaking in the idiom of art.

Of the composers who modelled their style upon Verdi's earlier manner, the most important were Petrella (1813-1877); Apolloni (1822-1889), the composer of 'L'Ebreo,' a melodrama of a rough and ready description, which was produced in 1855 and went the round of all the theatres of Italy; and Carlos Gomez (1839-1896), a Brazilian composer, whose opera, 'Il Guarany,' was performed in London in 1872. In him Verdi's vigour often degenerated into mere brutality, but his work is by no means without power, though he has little claim to distinction of style. Of the many operas written by Marchetti (1835-1902) only one, 'Ruy Blas,' founded upon Victor Hugo's play, achieved anything like permanent success. In form and general outline it owes much to Verdi's influence, but the vein of tender melody which runs through it strikes a note of individual inspiration. It was performed in London in 1877.

Arrigo Boito, to whom the University of Cambridge accorded the honour of an honorary degree in 1893, has written but one opera, 'Mefistofele,' but his influence upon modern Italian music must be measured in inverse ratio to his productive power. When 'Mefistofele' was originally produced in

1868, Verdi's genius was still in the chrysalis stage, and the novelty and force of Boito's music made 'Mefistofele,' even in its fall—for the first performance was a complete failure—a rallying point for the Italian disciples of truth and sincerity in music. In 1875 it was performed in a revised and abbreviated form, and since then has taken its place among the masterpieces of modern Italy. Boito's libretto reproduces the atmosphere of Goethe's drama far more successfully than any other of the many attempts to fit 'Faust' to the operatic stage. It is a noble poem, but from the merely scenic point of view it has many weaknesses. Its principal failing is the lack of one continuous thread of interest. The opera is merely a succession of episodes, each nicely calculated to throw fresh light upon the character of Faust, but by no means mutually connected. The prologue opens in Heaven, where the compact is made regarding the soul of Faust. The next scene shows the Kermesse, changing to Faust's study, where Mephistopheles appears and the contract is signed which binds him to Faust's service. We then pass to the garden scene, in which Faust is shown as Margaret's lover. Then come the Witches' Sabbath on the summit of the Brocken, and the prison scene with the death of Margaret. After this we have two scenes from the second part of Goethe's 'Faust,' the classical Sabbath, in which the union of Helen and Faust symbolises the embrace of the Greek and Germanic ideals, and the redemption of Faust with the discomfiture of Mephistopheles, which ends the work. Although 'Mefistofele' is unsatisfactory as a whole, the extraordinary beauty of several single scenes ought to secure for it such immortality as the stage has to offer. Boito is most happily inspired by Margaret, and the two scenes in which she appears are masterpieces of beauty and pathos. In the garden scene he has caught the ineffable simplicity of her character with astonishing success. The contrast between her girlish innocence and the voluptuous sentiment of Gounod's heroine cannot fail to strike the most careless listener. The climax of this scene, the delightfully tender and playful quartet, which culminates in a burst of hysterical laughter, is a stroke of genius. In the prison scene Boito rises to still greater heights. The poignant pathos of the poor maniac's broken utterances, the languorous beauty of the duet, and the frenzied terror and agony of the finale, are beyond praise.

Amilcare Ponchielli (1834-1886) owed much to both Verdi and Boito, and his best work, 'La Gioconda,' which was produced in 1876, bears unmistakable traces of the influence of 'Mefistofele' and 'Aida.' The libretto of 'La Gioconda' is founded upon a gloomy play by Victor Hugo, 'Angelo, Tyran de Padoue.' La Gioconda, a Venetian street singer, buys the safety of her lover Enzo from the spy Barnaba with her own hand, only to find that the former uses his new-found liberty to prosecute an intrigue with another woman. She generously contrives to save the lives of Enzo and his mistress, which are threatened by the vengeance of the latter's husband, and commits suicide in order to escape falling into the hands of Barnaba. Ponchielli's opera overflows with melody of a rather commonplace description. He has, besides, a certain dramatic gift, and the concerted music in 'La Gioconda' is powerful and effective. The ballet music is unusually good, and shows many favourable examples of Ponchielli's fondness for fanciful melodic designs, a mannerism which has been freely imitated by his pupils and followers. Another meritorious composer of the same school was Alfredo Catalani (1854-93), whose 'Lorelei' (1890) and 'La Wally' (1892) still hold the stage.

The most important of the younger men is Giacomo Puccini, a composer who during the last decade has come to the front in a decisive manner. His first opera, 'Le Villi,' was produced in 1884. The subject is a strange one to have taken the fancy of a southern composer. It is founded upon one of those weird traditions which seem essentially the property of Northern Europe. Villi, or in English, Wilis, are the spirits of affianced damsels, whose lovers have proved untrue. They rise from the earth at midnight, and assemble upon the highway attired in all their bridal finery. From midnight until dawn they wheel their wild dances and watch for their faithless lovers. If one of the latter happen to pass, he is beguiled into the magic circle, and in the grasp of the relentless Wilis is whirled round and round until he sinks expiring upon the ground. In Puccini's opera, the scene is laid in the Black Forest. The characters are three in number— Anna, her *fiancé* Robert, and her father Wilhelm Wulf. The first act opens with the betrothal of the lovers. After the usual festivities Robert departs for Mayence, whither he has to go to claim an inheritance. Six months elapse between the first and second acts. Robert has fallen into the toils of an abandoned woman, and is still at Mayence; Anna has died of a broken heart. The second act opens with two orchestral

movements, 'L'Abbandono,' which describes the funeral of Anna, and 'La Tregenda,' the dance of the Wilis. Robert now appears, torn by remorse, and pours forth his unavailing regrets. But the hour of repentance is past. Anna and her attendant Wilis rush on. The unfortunate man, in a kind of hypnotic trance, is drawn into their circling dance. They whirl him round and round in ever wilder and more fantastic gambols, until he drops lifeless upon the ground, and the avenging spirits disappear with a Hosanna of triumph. There is little attempt at local colour in 'Le Villi,' but the music is full of imaginative power. In the purely orchestral parts of the work the composer seems to have escaped from convention altogether, and has written music instinct with weird suggestion and unearthly force.

Puccini's next opera, 'Edgar' (1889), was a failure, but in 'Manon Lescaut' (1893) he once more achieved success. His treatment of the Abbé Prévost's romance, as may well be imagined, differs *in toto* from that of Massenet. The libretto, in the first place, is laid out upon an entirely different plan. It consists of a string of detached scenes with but little mutual connection, which, without some previous knowledge of the story, would be barely comprehensible. The first act deals with the meeting of the lovers at Amiens and their flight to Paris. In the second act we find Manon installed as the mistress of G ronte di Lavoisier, surrounded by crowds of admirers. Des Grieux penetrates to her apartment, and after a scene of passionate upbraiding persuades her to fly with him. But before they can depart they are interrupted by the entrance of Manon's irate protector, who, in revenge for her faithlessness, summons the police and consigns her to St. Lazare. The third act shows the quay at Havre, and the embarkation of the *filles de joie* for New Orleans; and the last act, which takes place in America, is one long duet between Manon and Des Grieux, ending with Manon's death. Puccini looked at the story of Manon through Italian spectacles. His power of characterisation is limited, and there is little in his music to differentiate Manon and her lover from the ordinary hero and heroine of Italian opera. The earlier scenes of the opera demand a lighter touch than he could then command, but in the tragic scene at Havre he is completely successful. Here he strikes the true note of tragedy. The great concerted piece with which the act ends is a masterly piece of writing, and proves that Puccini can handle a form, which as employed by lesser men is a synonym for stereotyped conventionality, with superb passion and sincerity.

But Puccini's earlier successes sank into insignificance by the side of the triumph of 'La Boh me,' which was produced in 1896. It was impossible to weave a connected story from Murger's famous novel. Puccini's librettists attempted nothing of the kind. They took four scenes each complete in itself and put them before the audience without any pretence of a connecting thread of interest. In the first act we see the joyous quartet of Bohemians in their Paris attic—Rodolphe the poet, Marcel the painter, Colline the philosopher, and Schaunard the musician. Rodolphe sacrifices the manuscript of his tragedy to keep the fire going, and Marcel keeps the landlord at bay, until the arrival of Schaunard with an unexpected windfall of provisions raises the spirits of the company to the zenith of rapture. Three of the Bohemians go out to keep Christmas Eve at their favourite caf , leaving Rodolphe to finish an article. To him enters Mimi, an embroiderer, who lodges on the same floor, under pretence of asking for a light. A delicious love-duet follows, and the lovers go off to join their friends. The next scene is at the Caf  Momus, where Musette appears with a wealthy banker. She speedily contrives to get the banker out of the way and rushes into the arms of her old lover, Marcel. This scene, which is very short, is a carnival of bustle and gaiety, and is a brilliant example of Puccini's happy knack of handling concerted music. The next scene is a series of quarrels and reconciliations between the two pairs of lovers, while in the last act Mimi, who has deserted Rodolphe, comes back to see him once more before she dies, and breathes her last on the little bed in the attic. Puccini's music echoes the spirit of Murger's romance with marvellous sincerity. It paints the mingled joy and grief of Bohemian life in hues the most delicate and tender. Like Murger, though dealing with things often squalid and unlovely, he never forgets that he is an artist. The sordid facts of life are gilded by the rainbow colours of romance. Puccini has caught the fanciful grace of Murger's style with the dexterity of genius. His music is thoroughly Italian in style, but he never strikes a false note. He dashes off the irresponsible gaiety of the earlier scenes with a touch which though light is always sure, and when the action deepens to tenderness, and even to pathos, he can be serious without falling into

sentimentality and impressive without encroaching upon the boundaries of melodrama. 'La Bohème' is one of the few operas of recent years which can be described as a masterpiece.

With 'La Tosca,' which was produced in 1899, Puccini won another success, though for very different reasons from those which made 'La Bohème' so conspicuous a triumph. The libretto is a clever condensation of Sardou's famous drama. The scene is laid in Rome in the year 1800. In the first act we are introduced to Mario Cavaradossi, a painter, who is at work in a church, and to Flora Tosca, his mistress, a famous singer, who pays him a visit and teases him with her jealous reproaches. Cavaradossi befriends Angelotti, a victim of Papal tyranny, who has escaped from the castle of St Angelo, and despatches him by a secret path to his villa in the outskirts of Rome. Scarpia, the chief of police, who is close upon Angelotti's heels, suspects Cavaradossi of being implicated in Angelotti's escape, and uses La Tosca's jealous suspicions to help him in securing the prisoner. In the next act Angelotti is still at large, but Cavaradossi has been arrested. Scarpia, who has meanwhile conceived a violent passion for La Tosca, extracts from her the secret of Angelotti's hiding-place by putting her lover to the torture in an adjoining room, whence his cries penetrate to her distracted ears. La Tosca buys her lover's safety by promising herself to Scarpia. The latter gives orders that Cavaradossi's execution shall only be a sham one, blank cartridge being substituted for bullets. When they are left alone, La Tosca murders Scarpia with a carving-knife when he tries to embrace her. In the last act, after a passionate duet between the lovers, Cavaradossi is executed—Scarpia having given a secret order to the effect that the execution shall be genuine after all—and La Tosca in despair throws herself into the Tiber.

In 'La Tosca' we are in a world very different from that of 'La Bohème.' Here there is very little scope for grace and tenderness. All is deadly earnest. The melodramatic incidents of the story crowd one upon another, and in the rush and excitement of the plot the music often has to take a secondary place. Whenever the composer has a chance he utilises it with rare skill. There are passages in 'La Tosca' of great lyrical beauty, but as a rule the exigencies of the stage give little room for musical development, and a great deal of the score is more like glorified incidental music than the almost symphonic fabric to which we are accustomed in modern opera.

The history of 'Madama Butterfly' (1904), Puccini's latest opera, is a strange one. At its production in Milan it was hissed off the stage and withdrawn after a single performance. No one seems to know why it failed to please the Scala audience, with whom Puccini had previously been a great favourite. Possibly the unfamiliar Japanese surroundings displeased the conservative Milanese, or the singers may have been inadequate. At any rate, when it was revived a few months later at Brescia, in a slightly revised form, it won more favour, and its London appearance the following year was a brilliant triumph. Since then it has gone the round of Europe and America, and is now probably the most popular opera in the modern repertory. The story of 'Madama Butterfly' is familiar to English hearers, the opera being founded upon the drama by David Belasco, which was played here with great success some years ago. Peculiarly apt for musical setting is the tale of the fascinating little 'moussmé' who contracts a so-called Japanese marriage with a lieutenant in the American navy, and after a brief union is driven by his perfidy to suicide. That the story is what may be called edifying can hardly be claimed, but the world has long since ceased to expect—perhaps even to desire—that opera should inculcate a lofty moral code.

However, to come to business, the scene opens in the garden of a country house among the hills above Nagasaki. Lieutenant Pinkerton and his friend Sharpless, the American consul, are inspecting the retreat which the former has prepared for his Japanese wife. The voices of Butterfly and her girl friends are soon heard in the distance as they ascend the hill. After an amusing scene of greeting and introduction comes the marriage ceremony and its attendant festivities, which are interrupted by the arrival of Butterfly's uncle. This venerable person, who is a priest in a neighbouring temple, has discovered that Butterfly has renounced her own religion and adopted that of her 'husband.' He pronounces the most portentous maledictions upon her and is bundled out by Pinkerton. The act ends with a love-duet of extraordinary beauty, breathing tenderness and passion in strains which seem to embody all the charm and mystery of the perfumed eastern night. Three years have passed when the next act begins. Butterfly is deserted and lives with her two-

year-old baby and her faithful maid Suzuki, praying and waiting for the husband who never comes. The friendly consul tries to break to her the news of Pinkerton's marriage with an American girl, but Butterfly cannot comprehend such perfidy. She sees Pinkerton's ship entering the harbour and calls Suzuki to help her deck the house with flowers. The music of this scene is exquisite, as is also that of the scene in which Sharpless reads Pinkerton's letter to Butterfly; but the whole act is a treasure-house of delicious melody and tender pathos. It ends curiously, but not the less effectively, with a short orchestral movement, played whilst Butterfly, Suzuki, and the child post themselves at the windows to watch through the night for the coming of Pinkerton. The grey dawn shows Butterfly still at her post, though the others have fallen asleep, but no Pinkerton appears. A little later that singularly unheroic person sneaks in with his wife, whom he commissions to interview Butterfly while he waits in the garden outside. Mrs. Pinkerton rather cold-bloodedly offers to take charge of the child, to which Butterfly agrees, and, after a passionate farewell, kills herself behind a screen. Puccini's music is unquestionably the strongest thing he has done yet. The score is richer and more solid than that of any of his earlier works, and the orchestration shows no falling off in ingenuity and resource. Melodically 'Madama Butterfly' is perhaps not so fresh or abundant as 'La Bohème,' but the composer's touch is firmer and surer in handling dramatic situations. 'Madama Butterfly' is unquestionably one of the most interesting and important operas of modern times, as it is one of the most attractive. It has established Puccini more firmly than ever in the position of the leading operatic composer of the day.

The name of Pietro Mascagni is chiefly connected in the minds of opera-goers with 'Cavalleria Rusticana,' This work, which was produced in 1890, lifted its composer at once into popularity. The story is founded upon one of Verga's Sicilian tales. Turiddu, a village Adonis, is beloved by the fair Lola. He enlists as a soldier, and on his return from the wars finds that the fickle damsel has married Alfio, a carter. He looks round him for fresh conquests, and his choice falls upon Santuzza. This arouses all Lola's latent coquetry, and she soon contrives to win him back to her side. The deserted Santuzza appeals in vain to his love and pity. He repulses her roughly, and in despair she tells Alfio the story of his wife's inconstancy. Alfio challenges Turiddu to mortal combat, and kills him as the curtain falls. Squalid as the story is, it is full of life and movement, and has that simple directness which is essential to success. The music is melodious, if not very original, and vigorous even to brutality. Mascagni here shows a natural instinct for the theatre. His method is often coarse, but his effects rarely miss their mark. At its production 'Cavalleria' was absurdly overpraised, but it certainly is a work of promise. Unfortunately the promise so far has not been fulfilled. 'L'Amico Fritz' and 'I Rantzau,' two adaptations of novels by Erckmann-Chatrian, produced respectively in 1891 and 1892, have almost disappeared from the current repertory. The first is a delicate little story of an old bachelor's love for a pretty country girl, the second a village 'Romeo and Juliet,' showing how an internecine feud between two brothers is ended by the mutual love of their children. Mascagni's melodramatic style was ill suited to idylls of this kind. He drowned the pretty little stories in oceans of perfervid orchestration, and banged all the sentiment out of them with drums and cymbals. Yet, in the midst of the desert of coarseness and vulgarity came oases of delicate fancy and imagination. The 'Cherry Duet' in 'L'Amico Fritz,' and the *Cicaleccio* chorus in 'I Rantzau,' are models of refinement and finish, which are doubly delightful by reason of their incongruous environment. Unfortunately such gems as these only make the coarseness of their setting the more conspicuous, and on the whole the sooner the world forgets about 'L'Amico Fritz' and 'I Rantzau' the better it will be for Mascagni's reputation. 'Guglielmo Ratcliff' and 'Silvano,' both produced in 1895, have not been heard out of Italy, nor is there much probability that they will ever cross the Alps. 'Zanetto' (1896), on the other hand, seems to contain the best work which Mascagni has yet given to the world. It is founded upon Francois Coppée's charming duologue, 'Le Passant,' a graceful scene between a world-weary courtesan and a youthful troubadour who passes beneath her balcony. Mascagni's music, which is scored only for strings and harp, is both delicate and refined, and instinct with a tender melancholy, for which it would be vain to look in his earlier works. 'Iris' (1898), an opera on a rather unpleasant Japanese story, has met with a certain degree of favour, but 'Le Maschere' (1901), an attempt to introduce Harlequin and Columbine to the lyric stage, failed completely, nor does 'Amica' (1905) seem to have done much to rehabilitate



the composer's waning reputation. Mascagni has as yet done little to justify the extravagant eulogies with which his first work was greeted, and his warmest admirers are beginning to fear that the possibility of his doing something to redeem the early promise of 'Cavalleria' is getting rather remote.

Leoncavallo, though older than Mascagni, must be regarded as in a certain sense his follower, since his most popular work, 'Pagliacci,' was undoubtedly inspired by 'Cavalleria Rusticana.' The story begins with the arrival of a troupe of travelling comedians, or *Pagliacci*, in an Italian village. All is not harmony in the little company. Tonio (the Taddeo, or clown) loves Nedda (Columbine), the wife of Canio (Pagliaccio), but she already has a lover in the shape of Silvio, a young villager, and rejects the clumsy advances of the other with scorn. Tonio overhears the mutual vows of Nedda and her lover, and bent upon vengeance, hurries off to bring the unsuspecting Canio upon the scene. He only arrives in time to see the disappearance of Silvio, and cannot terrify his wife into disclosing her lover's name, though he is only just prevented by Beppe, the Harlequin of the troupe, from stabbing her on the spot. The second act is on the evening of the same day, a few hours later. The curtain of the rustic theatre goes up and the little play begins. By a curious coincidence the scheme of the plot represents something like the real situation of the actors. Columbine is entertaining her lover Harlequin in the absence of her husband Pagliaccio, while Taddeo keeps a look-out for his return. When he returns we see that the mimic comedy is to develop into real tragedy. Canio scarcely makes a pretence of keeping to his rôle of Pagliaccio. Mad with jealousy, he rushes on his wife and tries to make her confess the name of her lover. She refuses, and in the end he stabs her, while Silvio, who has formed one of the rustic audience, leaps on to the stage only to receive his death-blow as well. As in 'Cavalleria,' the theme of the story is squalid and unpleasant, though lucid and undeniably effective for stage purposes. The music makes an effective accompaniment to the exciting incidents of the plot, but it has few claims to intrinsic interest. Leoncavallo is never much of a melodist, and 'Pagliacci' teems with reminiscences. The opera was probably written in a hurry, in order to pander to the taste for melodrama which 'Cavalleria' had excited. In 'I Medici' (1893), a tale of the Florentine Renaissance, Leoncavallo aimed far higher. Here, too, however, his music is for the most part a string of ill-digested reminiscences, though scored with such extraordinary cleverness and fertility of resource as almost to disguise the inherent poverty of the score. 'Chatterton' (1896) was a failure, but 'La Bohème' (1897), though somewhat cast into the shade by Puccini's work upon the same subject, scored a decided success. Leoncavallo's music is conceived in a totally different mood from that of Puccini. He has little of Puccini's grace and tenderness, but he treated the scenes of Bohemian life with amazing energy and spirit, if with an occasional suggestion of brutality. 'Zaza' (1900), founded upon a French play which recently achieved a scandalous notoriety, has found little favour even in Italy. Leoncavallo's latest work, 'Der Roland,' was written in response to a commission from the German Emperor, who believed that he had found in the composer of 'I Medici' a musician worthy to celebrate the mighty deeds of the Hohenzollerns. 'Der Roland' was produced in a German version at Berlin in 1904, and in spite of Court patronage failed completely.

Umberto Giordano, who during the last few years has steadily worked his way to the front rank of Italian composers, started his career with a *succès de scandale* in 'Mala Vita' (1892), a coarse and licentious imitation of 'Cavalleria Rusticana.' There is far better work in 'Andrea Chénier' (1896), a stirring tale of the French Revolution set to music which shows uncommon dramatic power and in certain scenes a fine sense of lyrical expression. After a good deal of preludial matter the plot centres in the rivalry of Chénier the poet and Gérard, a revolutionary leader, for the hand of Madeleine. Gérard condemns Chénier to death, but is melted by Madeleine's pleading, and rescinds the order for his execution. The pardon, however, comes too late, and Madeleine and Chénier ascend the scaffold together, in an ecstasy of lyrical rapture. 'Fedora' (1898), an adaptation of Sardou's famous drama, has less musical interest than 'Andrea Chénier,' the breathless incidents of the plot giving but little scope for musical treatment. The first act shows the death of Vladimir, the police investigation and Fedora's vow to discover the murderer. In the second Fedora extorts from Loris Ipanoff a confession of the vengeance that he wreaked upon the

perfidious Vladimir, and, finding Loris innocent and Vladimir guilty, in a sudden revulsion of feeling throws herself into Loris's arms, bidding him stay with her rather than leave the house to fall into the hands of spies. In the third act *Fedora*, certain of detection, confesses to Loris her previous machinations against him, which have resulted in the deaths of his mother and brother, and takes poison before his eyes. Giordano touched a far higher level in *'Siberia'* (1903), a gloomy tale of Russian crime and punishment. Stephana, a courtesan, among all her lovers cares only for the young sergeant Vassili. Vassili, who has learnt to love her, not knowing who she is, when he discovers the truth, bursts in upon a fête she is giving, quarrels with a lieutenant and kills him on the spot. He is condemned to exile in Siberia, but is followed by Stephana, who overtakes him at the frontier, and gets leave to share his fate. In the mines they find Globy, Stephana's original seducer, whose infamy she exposes to the assembled convicts. In revenge Globy betrays to the authorities a project of escape devised by Stephana and Vassili, and the lovers are shot just as liberty appears to be within their grasp. The music of *'Siberia'* is more artistic than anything Giordano has previously written. The situations are skilfully handled, and the note of pity and pathos is touched with no uncertain hand. The opera is unequal, but the scene of the halt at the frontier is treated in masterly fashion.

Francesco Ciléa won no marked success until the production of his *'Adriana Lecouvreur'* in 1902. The plot is an adaptation of Scribe's famous play, but so trenchantly abbreviated as to be almost incomprehensible. The opening scene in the *foyer* of the Comédie Française is bright and lively, the handling of the score arousing pleasant reminiscences of Verdi's *'Falstaff'*, but the more dramatic passages in the struggle of Adrienne and her rival the Princess de Bouillon for Maurice de Saxe seem to be outside the scope of the composer's talent, and the great moments of the piece are somewhat frigid and unimpressive. There is a note of pathos, however, in Adrienne's death-scene, and the character of Michonnet is elaborated with skill and feeling. Ciléa's latest opera, *'Gloria'* (1907), a blood-thirsty story of the struggle between the Guelphs and Ghibellines, does not appear to have won much favour in Italy.

Edoardo Mascheroni's early laurels were won as a conductor, but in 1901 he sprang into fame as the composer of *'Lorenza'*, an opera which has met with much success in various cities of Spain and Spanish America as well as in Italy. *'Lorenza'* is a Calabrian version of the time-honoured story of Judith and Holofernes, though in this case the Judith, so far from slaying her brigand Holofernes, falls in love with him, and ends by disguising herself in his cloak and allowing herself to be shot by the soldiers who come to capture the bandit chief. Mascheroni's score overflows with thoroughly Italian melody, and shows considerable knowledge of dramatic effect, which from a conductor of his experience was only to be expected.

Of the numerous other Italian composers who bask in the sunshine of popularity south of the Alps very few are known to fame beyond the frontiers of Italy. The younger men follow religiously in the steps of Mascagni or Puccini, while their elders still hang on to the skirts of *'Aida.'* Giacomo Orefice won a success of curiosity in 1901 with his *'Chopin,'* a strange work dealing in fanciful fashion with the story of the Polish composer's life, the melodies of the opera being taken entirely from Chopin's music.

Spinelli's *'A Basso Porto'* (1895), which has been performed in English by the Carl Rosa Opera Company, is redolent of Mascagni's influence, but the nauseating incidents of the plot make *'Cavalleria,'* by comparison, seem chaste and classical. The libretto deals with the vengeance wreaked by a villainous Neapolitan street loafer upon a woman who has played him false—a vengeance which takes the form of ruining her son by drink and play, and of attempting to seduce her daughter. In the end this egregious ruffian is murdered in the street by the mother of his two victims, just in time to prevent his being knifed by the members of a secret society whom he had betrayed to justice. The music is not without dramatic vigour, and it has plenty of melody of a rough and ready kind. There is technical skill, too, in the treatment of the voices and in the orchestration, but hardly enough to reconcile an English audience to so offensive a book. Salvatore Auteri-Manzocchi has never repeated the early success of *'Dolores,'* and Spiro Samara, a Greek by birth, but an Italian by training and sympathies, seems to have lost the secret of the delicate imagination

which nearly made 'Flora Mirabilis' a European success, though his 'Martire,' a work of crude sensationalism, enjoyed an ephemeral success in Italy. Franchetti, the composer of 'Asrael,' 'Cristoforo Colombo,' and other works, conceived upon a scale grandiose rather than grand, appears anxious to emulate the theatrical glories of Meyerbeer, and to make up for poverty of inspiration by spectacular magnificence, but none of his operas has yet succeeded in crossing the Alps.

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## CHAPTER XIII

### MODERN GERMAN AND SLAVONIC OPERA

CORNELIUS—GOETZ—GOLDMARK—HUMPERDINCK—STRAUSS— SMETANA—GLINKA—PADEREWSKI

The history of music furnishes more than one instance of the paralysing effect which the influence of a great genius is apt to exercise upon his contemporaries and immediate successors. The vast popularity of Handel in England had the effect of stunting the development of our national music for more than a century. During his lifetime, and for many years after his death, English-born musicians could do little but imitate his more salient mannerisms, and reproduce in an attenuated form the lessons which he had taught. The effect of Wagner's music upon German opera has been something of the same description. As soon as his works gained their legitimate place in the affections of his countrymen, his influence began to assume formidable proportions. The might of his individuality was irresistible. It was not possible, as in Italy and France, to combine the system of Wagner with other elements. In Germany it had to be Wagner or nothing, and thus, except for the writers of sentimental Singspiele, a form of opera which scarcely comes into the province of art at all, German musicians have vied with each other in producing imitations of their great master, which succeeded or failed according to the measure of their resemblance to their model, but had very little value as original work. The production of Humperdinck's 'Hänsel und Gretel' gave rise to a hope that the merely imitative period was passing away, but it is plain that the mighty shadow of Wagner still hangs over German music. Strauss's 'Salome' may be the herald of a new epoch, but on that subject it is too soon to indulge in prophecy.

Wagner had completed what, for the sake of convenience, we have called his earlier period, before his influence began to make itself felt in German opera. 'Lohengrin' was performed for the first time under Liszt's direction at Weimar in 1850. Eight years later Cornelius's 'Barbier von Bagdad' was performed at the same theatre under the same conductor. This was Liszt's last production at Weimar, for the ill-feeling stirred up by Cornelius's work was so pronounced that the great pianist threw up his position as Kapellmeister in disgust, and took refuge in the more congenial society of Rome. Peter Cornelius (1824-1874) was one of the most prominent of the band of young men who gathered round Liszt at Weimar, and by means of their music and writings sought to further the cause of 'New-German' art. 'Der Barbier von Bagdad' was immensely in advance of its time. It failed completely to attract the public of Weimar, the most cultivated in Europe, when it was originally produced, but it is now one of the most popular operas in Germany. The beauties of the score are doubly astonishing when it is remembered that when it was written 'Die Meistersinger' had not been composed. The germs of much that delights us in Wagner's comic opera may be found in 'Der Barbier,' and it is certain that if Cornelius received his initial impulse from 'Lohengrin,' he himself reacted upon Wagner to a very remarkable extent. The plot of 'Der Barbier' is long-winded and puerile, and the interest is entirely centred in the music. Noureddin loves Margiana, the daughter of the Cadi, and is bidden to an interview by Bostana, her *confidante*. He takes with him Abul Hassan, a talkative fool of a barber, who watches in the street while Noureddin visits his sweetheart. Suddenly the cries of a slave undergoing the bastinado are heard. The barber jumps to the conclusion that Noureddin is being murdered, summons help and invades the house. Noureddin takes refuge from the wrath of the Cadi in a chest. The commotion and tumult end in bringing the Caliph upon the scene, and the unfortunate youth is discovered half dead in his hiding-place. He is revived by the barber, and presented with the hand of Margiana. To this silly story Cornelius wrote music of extraordinary power and beauty. Much of it is of course light and trivial, but such scenes as that of the Muezzin call, or the wild confusion of the last finale, are fully worthy of the master upon whom Cornelius modelled his style. Cornelius had a pretty gift for humorous orchestration, and his accompaniments often anticipate the dainty effects of 'Die Meistersinger.' 'Das Rheingold' being still unwritten in 1858, it would be too much to expect a systematised use of guiding themes, but they are often employed with consummate skill, and in the

Muezzin scene the music of the call to prayer forms the basis of a symphonic passage, which is thoroughly in the style of Wagner's later works. Cornelius left two posthumous works, 'Der Cid' and 'Gunlöd,' which have been produced during the last few years. They are little more than imitations of Wagner's maturer style. Hermann Goetz (1840-1876) was a composer whose early death cut short a career of remarkable promise. He produced but one opera during his lifetime, but that displayed an originality and a resource for which it would be vain to look in the multifarious compositions of the Kapellmeisters of the period. 'Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung' follows the incidents of 'The Taming of the Shrew' very closely. The action begins at night. Lucentio is serenading Bianca, but his ditty is interrupted by a riot among Baptista's servants, who refuse to submit any longer to Katharine's ill-treatment. Peace is restored, and Lucentio resumes his song. A second interruption is in store for him in the shape of Hortensio, another of Bianca's suitors, also upon serenading bent. Baptista, angry at being disturbed again by the quarrels of the rival musicians, dismisses them with the information that Bianca shall be bestowed upon neither of them until Katharine is wedded. Petruchio now enters, and fired with Hortensio's description of Katharine's beauty and spirit, vows to make her his own.

The second act begins with a scene between Katharine and her sister, which conclusively proves that the reports of the former's shrewishness have not exceeded the truth. Hortensio and Lucentio, disguised respectively as a music master and a teacher of languages, are now ushered in, and receive most uncourteous treatment at Katharine's hands. The act ends with Petruchio's wooing of Katharine, and the settlement of their wedding-day. In the third act comes the marriage of Petruchio and Katharine, and the fourth act shows the taming of the shrew in strict accordance with Shakespeare's comedy. Goetz's music brims over with frolicsome humour and gaiety, and the more serious portions are tender without being sentimental. The influence of Wagner is more plainly seen in the musicianly development of the melodies than in their employment as guiding themes, though of this, too, there are not a few instances. But the parts of the work in which Goetz's indebtedness to Wagner are most apparent are the choruses, which, both in their tunefulness and in the elaborate nature of the part-writing, often recall 'Die Meistersinger,' and in the orchestration, which is extraordinarily fanciful and imaginative. 'Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung' has never been properly appreciated in this country, in spite of the familiar nature of the libretto. Goetz left another opera, 'Francesca da Rimini,' unfinished. This was completed by his friend Ernst Frank, but has never met with much success.

Cornelius and Goetz would have been the first to admit the influence which Wagner's works exercised upon their imagination, yet their admiration for his music never seduced them into anything like mere imitation. The operas of Carl Goldmark are founded far more directly upon the methods and system of Wagner. Yet it would be unjust to dismiss him as a mere plagiarist. In his first work, 'Die Königin von Saba' (1875), there is a great deal which is entirely independent of Wagner's or any one else's influence. The plot of the work has really nothing Biblical about it, and if the names of the characters were changed, the work might be produced to-morrow at Covent Garden without offending the most puritanical susceptibilities. Sulamith, the daughter of the high priest, is to wed Assad, a Jewish warrior, upon his return from a military expedition, but Assad has fallen in with the Queen of Sheba on her way to Jerusalem, and her charms have proved fatal to his constancy. Sulamith is prepared to forgive him, but his love for the queen is irresistible, and even at the altar he leaves Sulamith for her embraces. Finally Assad is banished to the desert, where he is overwhelmed by a sandstorm. 'Die Königin von Saba' is a strong and effective opera. The local colour is managed very skilfully, and the orchestration is novel and brilliant. Yet there is very little of that indefinable quality, which we call sincerity, about the score. It was happily described at its production as a clever imitation of good music. The influence of Wagner is strongest in the love music, which owes much to 'Tristan und Isolde,' 'Merlin' (1886), Goldmark's second opera, has not been as successful in Germany as 'Die Königin von Saba,' The libretto, which is founded upon the Arthurian legend of Merlin and Vivien, shows many points of resemblance to Wagner's later works, and the music follows his system of guiding themes far more closely than in the earlier work. 'Merlin' may stand as an instance of the unfortunate influence which a man of Wagner's power and originality exercises upon his contemporaries. There is little in

it which cannot be traced more or less directly to a prototype in the works of Wagner, and it need scarcely be said that Goldmark does not improve upon his model. In 'Das Heimchen am Herd' (1896), the libretto of which is founded upon Dickens's famous story 'The Cricket on the Hearth,' Goldmark seems to have tried to emulate the success of Humperdinck's 'Hänsel und Gretel.' There are suggestions in it, too, of the influence of Smetana who dawned upon the Viennese horizon in 1890. In this work, which has been performed with great success in Germany, and was produced in English by the Carl Rosa Company in 1900, the composer contrived very cleverly to put off the grandiose manner of his earlier operas. Elaborate as the orchestral part of the score is, it is never allowed to overpower the voices, and the general impression of the opera is one of rare simplicity and charm. Goldmark's later works, 'Die Kriegsgefangene' (1899) and 'Götz von Berlichingen' (1902), have been less successful.

Cyrril Kistler (1848-1907) was spoken of some years ago as the man upon whom Wagner's mantle had fallen, but his recent death has shattered the hopes founded upon the promise of his early works. 'Kunihild,' a work dealing with a heroic legend, was produced in 1883. It is a clever imitation of the Wagnerian manner, except as regards the choruses, which scarcely rise above the standard of the Liedertafel; but neither at its production nor at an elaborate revival, which took place at Würzburg a few years ago, did it meet with more than a *succès d'estime*. There seems to be better work in 'Eulenspiegel,' a comic opera founded upon Kotzebue's comedy. The music is instinct with genuine humour, and though but remotely suggesting the methods of Wagner shows complete mastery of technical resource.

The most important contribution to German opera made during the decade that followed the death of Wagner was Humperdinck's 'Hänsel und Gretel,' which was produced in December 1893. Before that time the composer was known to fame, at any rate so far as England is concerned, only by a couple of cantatas and some arrangements of scenes from Wagner's works for concert purposes, but at one bound he became the most popular living operatic composer of Germany. The libretto of 'Hänsel und Gretel' is a very charming arrangement, in three scenes, of a familiar nursery tale. The action opens in the cottage of Peter the broom-maker. Hänsel and Gretel, the two children, are left to keep house together. They soon tire of their tasks, and Gretel volunteers to teach her brother how to dance. In the middle of their romp, Gertrude their mother comes in, and angrily packs them off into the wood to pick strawberries. Tired and faint she sinks into a chair, bewailing the lot of the poor man's wife, with empty cupboards and hungry mouths to be fed. Soon Peter's voice is heard singing in the distance. He has had a good sale for his besoms, and comes back laden with good cheer. But his delight is cut short by the absence of the children, and when he finds that they are out in the wood alone, he terrifies his wife with the story of the witch of Schornstein, who is given to eating little children, and they both hurry off to bring Hänsel and Gretel home. Meanwhile, out in the forest the children amuse themselves with picking strawberries and making flower garlands, until the approach of night, when they find to their horror that they have lost their way. They search for it in vain, and at last, completely tired out, they sink down upon the moss beneath a spreading tree. The Dustman—the German sleep-fairy—appears and throws dust in their weary eyes. Together they sing their little evening hymn, and drop off to sleep locked in each other's arms. Then the heavens open, and down a shining staircase come the bright forms of angels, who group themselves round the sleeping children, and watch over their innocent slumbers until the break of day. Hänsel and Gretel are aroused by the Dew-fairy, who sprinkles his magic branch over them and drives the sleep from their eyes. They tell each other of the wonderful dream which came to both of them, and then, looking round for the first time, discover a beautiful gingerbread house, close to where they were sleeping. This is where the witch of the forest lives, who bakes little children into gingerbread in her great oven, and eats them up. She catches Hänsel and Gretel, and nearly succeeds in her wicked schemes, but the children, with great presence of mind, defeat her malice by pushing her into her own oven. Then they free the other children who have been turned into gingerbread through her magic spells, and the father and mother opportunely appearing, all join in a hymn of thanksgiving for their deliverance.

Humperdinck's music reproduces, with infinite art, the tender and childlike charm of the delightful

old fairy tale. His score is amazingly elaborate, and his treatment of the guiding themes which compose it is kaleidoscopic in its variety, yet the whole thing flows on as naturally as a ballad. The voice-parts are always suave and melodious, and the orchestral score, however complicated, never loses touch of consummate musical beauty. Humperdinck's melody is founded upon the Volkslied, and he uses at least one nursery tune with charming effect. The framework of 'Hänsel und Gretel' is that bequeathed by Wagner, but the spirit which animates and informs the work is so different from that of the Bayreuth master, that there can be no suspicion of imitation, much less of plagiarism. Humperdinck is the first German operatic composer of distinct individuality since the death of Wagner. He has shown that the methods of the great composer can be used as a garment to cover an individuality as distinct as that of any writer in the history of opera.

Humperdinck's share of 'Die sieben Geislein,' a children's ballad opera which was published some years ago, consists only of a few songs of an unimportant character, which will not enhance his reputation. 'Königskinder,' which was produced in 1897, must be classed as a play with incidental music rather than as an opera. The composer directed that the accompanied dialogue, of which there is a good deal, should be rhythmically chanted, but when the work came to be performed these directions were practically ignored by the players. 'Königskinder' was followed in 1902 by 'Dornröschen,' another fairy play accompanied by incidental music, which won little success, nor has good fortune attended his latest opera, 'Die Heirath wider Willen' (1905).

Among the younger generation of German composers, mention must be made of Max Schillings, whose very promising 'Ingwelde' (1894) has recently been succeeded by a remarkable work entitled 'Moloch' (1907); and of Wilhelm Kienzl, the composer of 'Der Evangelimann' (1895). In 'Ingwelde' Schillings followed the Wagnerian tradition almost too faithfully, but 'Moloch' is a work of very distinct individuality. 'Der Evangelimann,' on the other hand, is thoroughly eclectic in style, and the influence not only of Wagner, but of Meyerbeer, Gounod and even Mascagni, may be traced in its pages. Kienzl's later works have met with little favour. 'Donna Diana' (1895), by a composer named Reznicek, is a comic opera founded upon a Spanish subject, which has had a most successful career in Germany during the past few years. It is elaborate in construction, and indeed the score seems to be too complicated to harmonise well with the comic incidents of the story. More recently the composer has won success with a work on the subject of Till Eulenspiegel. Heinrich Zöllner came to the front in 1899 with 'Die versunkene Glocke,' an opera founded upon Gerhart Hauptmann's famous play, which is said to reproduce the symbolic charm of the original with conspicuous success. Eugene d'Albert, though English by birth, has for so long identified himself with Germany, that the success of his comic opera, 'Die Abreise' (1898), may most suitably be recorded here. His more ambitious works have been less favourably received. Siegfried Wagner, in spite of his parentage, seems to have founded his style principally upon that of Humperdinck. His first opera, 'Der Bärenhäuter' (1899), was fairly successful, principally owing to a fantastic and semi-comic libretto. 'Herzog Wildfang' (1901) and 'Der Kobold' (1904) failed completely, nor does his latest work, 'Bruder Lustig' (1905), raise very sanguine hopes as to its young composer's future career. Another follower of Humperdinck is Eduard Poldini, whose clever and charming 'Der Vagabund und die Prinzessin,' a graceful version of one of Hans Andersen's stories, was given in London with success in 1906.

Mention must also be made of Felix Weingartner, whose 'Genesius' (1892) and 'Orestes' (1902) are said to contain much fine music; of August Bungert, whose trilogy founded upon the Odyssey has been received with favour in Dresden, though it does not appear to have made much way elsewhere; and of Hans Pfitzner, whose 'Rose von Liebesgarten' (1901) is one of the most promising operas of the younger generation.

The most important figure in the world of German opera to-day is unquestionably that of Richard Strauss. This is not the place to dilate upon Strauss's achievements as a symphonic writer, which are sufficiently well known to the world at large. His first opera, 'Guntram' (1894), was hardly more than an exercise in the manner of Wagner, and made comparatively little impression. 'Feuersnot' (1901) was a far more characteristic production. It deals with an old legend of the love of a sorcerer for a maiden. The sorcerer is rejected, and in revenge he deprives the town in which the maiden

lives of fire and light. The townspeople press the maiden to relent, and her yielding is signalled by a sudden blaze of splendour. Strauss's score shows to the full the amazing command of polyphony and the bewildering richness and variety of orchestration which have made his name famous. The plot of 'Feuersnoth,' however, was against it, and it does not seem to have won a permanent success. 'Salome' (1906), on the other hand, has triumphed in Italy and Paris as well as in Germany, and succeeded in scandalising New York so seriously that it was withdrawn after a single performance. 'Salome' is a setting, almost unabbreviated, of Oscar Wilde's play of that name, which itself owed much to a tale by Flaubert. The scene is laid upon a terrace of Herod's palace, where soldiers are keeping watch while the king holds revel within. Salome, the daughter of Herodias, issues from the banquet chamber, troubled by Herod's gaze. The voice of Jochanaan (John the Baptist), who is imprisoned in a cistern hard by, is heard. Salome bids Narraboth, a young Assyrian, bring him forth. Dragged from his living tomb, Jochanaan denounces the wickedness of Herodias, but Salome has no ears for his curses. Fascinated by the strange beauty of the prophet, she pours forth her passion in wild accents. Jochanaan repulses her and retreats once more to his cistern. Herod and Herodias now come forth from the banquet, and Herod bids Salome dance. She extorts a promise from him that he will give her whatever she asks, even to the half of his kingdom, and dances the dance of the seven veils. The dance over, she demands the head of Jochanaan. Herod pleads with her in vain, the executioner is sent into the cistern and the head of Jochanaan is brought in upon a silver charger. Salome kisses the lifeless lips, but Herod in wrath and horror cries to his soldiers: 'Kill this woman,' and as the curtain falls she is crushed beneath their shields. Strauss is the stormy petrel of modern music, and 'Salome' has aroused more discussion than anything he has written. Many critics quite the reverse of prudish have found its ethics somewhat difficult of digestion, while conservative musicians hold up their hands in horror at its harmonic audacity. The more advanced spirits find a strange exotic beauty in the weird harmonies and infinitely suggestive orchestration, and contend with some justice that a work of art must be judged as such, not as an essay in didactic morality. The 'Salome' question may well be left for time to settle, more especially as the subject and treatment of the work combine to put its production upon the London stage beyond the limits of immediate probability.

In modern times Singspiel has for the most part become merged in comic opera, which, though originally an importation from France, has become thoroughly acclimatised in Germany, and in the hands of such men as Johann Strauss, Franz von Suppé, and Carl Millöcker, has produced work of no little artistic interest, though scarcely coming within the scope of this book. To the Singspiel, too, may be traced an exceedingly unpretentious school of opera, dealing for the most part with homely and sentimental subjects, of which the best-known representative is Victor Nessler (1841-1890). Nessler's opera, 'Der Trompeter von Säkkingen,' is still one of the most popular works in the repertory of German opera-houses, and his 'Rattenfänger von Hameln' is scarcely less of a favourite. The first of these works is founded upon Scheffel's well-known poem, and tells in artless fashion of the love of Jung Werner, the trumpeter, for the daughter of the Baron von Schönau; the second deals with the story of the Hamelin rat-catcher, which Browning has immortalised. Nessler has little more than a vein of simple melody to recommend him, and his works have had no success beyond the frontiers of Germany; but at home his flow of rather feeble sentimentality has endeared him to every susceptible heart in the Fatherland.

Closely allied to the German school of opera is that of Bohemia, of which the most famous representative is Smetana (1824-1884). Outside the frontiers of his native land, Smetana was practically unknown until the Vienna Exhibition of 1890, when his opera, 'Die verkaufte Braut,' was produced for the first time in the Austrian capital. Since then it has been played in many German opera-houses, and was performed in London in 1895, and again in 1907. The story is simplicity itself. Jeník, a young peasant, and Marenka, the daughter of the rich farmer Krusina, love each other dearly; but Kezal, a kind of go-between in the Bohemian marriage-market, tells Krusina that he can produce a rich husband for his daughter in the shape of Vasek, the son of Mícha. The avaricious old man jumps at the proposal, but Marenka will have nothing to say to the arrangement, for Vasek is almost an idiot, and a stammerer as well. Kezal then proceeds to buy Jeník out for three hundred gulden. The latter, however, stipulates that in the agreement it shall only be set



down that Marenka is to marry the son of Mícha. The contract is signed and the money is paid, whereupon Jeník announces that he is a long-lost son of Mícha by a youthful marriage, and carries off the bride, to the discomfiture of his enemies. If Smetana owes anything to anybody it is to Mozart, whose form and system of orchestration his own occasionally recalls, but his music is so thoroughly saturated with the melodies and rhythms of Bohemia, that it is quite unnecessary to look for any source of inspiration other than the composer's own native land. But although Smetana's music is Bohemian to the core, he brings about his effects like a true artist. The national colour is not laid on in smudges, but tinges the whole fabric of the score. Smetana's other works are less known outside Bohemia. 'Das Geheimniss' and 'Der Kuss' are comic operas of a thoroughly national type, while 'Dalibor' and 'Libusa' deal with stirring episodes of Bohemian history.

More famous than his master is Smetana's pupil Dvorak (1841-1904), yet the latter seems to have had little real vocation for the stage. His operas, 'Der Bauer ein Schelm' and 'Der Dickschädel,' appear to follow the style of Smetana very closely. They have been favourably received in Bohemia, but the thoroughly national sentiment of the libretti must naturally militate against their success elsewhere.

In Russia the development of opera, and indeed of music generally, is of comparatively recent date. Glinka (1803-1857), the founder of the school, is still perhaps its most famous representative, although his operas, in spite of frequent trials, seem never to succeed beyond the frontiers of Russia. The splendid patriotism of 'Life for the Czar' (1836), his most famous work, endears him to the hearts of his countrymen. The scene of the opera is laid in the seventeenth century, when the Poles held Moscow and the fortunes of Russia were at the lowest ebb. Michael Fedorovich Romanov has just been elected Czar, and upon him the hopes of the people are centred. The Poles are determined to seize the person of the Czar, and some of them, disguised as ambassadors, summon the peasant Ivan Sussaninna to guide them to his retreat. Ivan sacrifices his life for his master. He despatches his adopted son to warn the Czar, and himself leads the Poles astray in the wild morasses of the country. When they discover that they have been betrayed they put Ivan to death, but not before he has had the satisfaction of knowing that the Czar is in safety. The opera ends with the triumphal entry of the Czar into Moscow.

'Russian and Ludmila' (1858), Glinka's second work, is founded upon a fantastic Russian legend of magic and necromancy. It has not the national and patriotic interest of 'Life for the Czar,' but as music it deserves to rank higher. Berlioz thought very highly of it. Nevertheless it may be doubted whether, at this time of day, there is any likelihood of Glinka becoming popular in Western Europe. Glinka had an extraordinary natural talent, and had he lived in closer touch with the musical world, he might have become one of the great composers of the century. Melody he had in abundance, and his feeling for musical form is strong, though only partially developed. He had little dramatic instinct, and it is singular that he should be known principally as a composer for the stage. His treatment of the orchestra is brilliant and effective, but the national element in his music is the *signe particulier* of his style. He rarely used actual Russian folk-tunes, but his music is coloured throughout by the plaintive melancholy of the national type. A composer, whose music smells so strongly of the soil, can scarcely expect to be appreciated abroad.

Dargomishky (1813-1869) and Serov (1818-1871) are unfamiliar names to Englishmen. The former during his lifetime was content to follow in the steps of Glinka, but his opera, 'The Marble Guest,' a treatment of the story of Don Juan, which was produced after his death, broke entirely fresh ground. This work is completely modern in thought and expression, and may be regarded as the foundation of modern Russian opera. Serov was an enthusiastic imitator of Wagner, and even his own countrymen admit that his works have little musical value.

Rubinstein (1829-1895) wrote many works for the stage, and during the last years of his life founded something like a new form of art in his sacred operas, 'Moses' and 'Christus,' the latter of which was produced after his death at Bremen. Critics differ very much as to Rubinstein's merits as a composer, but as to the quality of his work for the stage there can hardly be two opinions. His

music is essentially undramatic. None of his works, at any rate outside Russia, has achieved more than a passing success. 'The Demon,' a strange story of the love of a demon for a Russian princess, has some fine music in it, but the story is almost totally devoid of incident, and the opera as a whole is intolerably wearisome.

Of the younger school of Russian operatic composers it is almost impossible to speak with any authority, since their works are rarely performed in Western Europe. Tchaikovsky's 'Eugene Onegin' is occasionally given in London, but has won little success. Much of the music is interesting, but the disconnected character of the libretto and the lack of incident fully account for the scanty favour with which it is received. 'Le Flibustier,' an opera by César Cui, was performed in Paris a few years ago with even less success. Borodin's 'Prince Igor,' and 'Die Mainacht' by Rimsky-Korsakov, are thought highly of by the fellow-countrymen of the composers, but neither work has succeeded in crossing the frontier of Russia.

Poland has not hitherto taken a prominent place in the history of opera, and the successful production of 'Manru' (1901), an opera by Ignaz Paderewski, the world-famous pianist, is hardly to be taken as the foundation of a new school. The story deals with the fortunes of a gipsy, Manru, who marries Ulana, a peasant girl, but is won back to gipsy life by the fascinations of Asa, the princess of his tribe. He rejoins his own people in spite of Ulana's entreaties and a love-potion which she administers, but is killed by a gipsy rival, while Ulana in despair throws herself into a lake. Paderewski's music is thoroughly German in style, but he makes clever use of gipsy tunes and rhythms, which give a welcome variety to the score.

The genius of Scandinavian musicians seems to have little in common with the stage. The works of Hartmann and Weyse are not known beyond the boundaries of Denmark. Of late years, however, works by August Enna, a young Danish composer, have been performed in various German towns. 'Die Hexe' and 'Cleopatra' won a good deal of success, but the composer's more recent operas, 'Aucassin und Nicolette' and 'Das Streichholzmädel,' have met with little favour.

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# CHAPTER XIV

## ENGLISH OPERA

BALFE—WALLACE—BENEDICT—GORING THOMAS—MACKENZIE STANFORD—SULLIVAN—SMYTH

Soon after the death of Purcell, the craze for Italian opera seems to have banished native art completely from the English stage. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the most popular form of entertainment consisted of operas set to a mixture of English and Italian words, but after a time the town, to quote Addison, tired of understanding only half the work, determined for the future to understand none of it, and these hybrid works gave place, after the arrival of Handel, to the splendid series of masterpieces extending from 'Rinaldo' to 'Deidamia.' From time to time attempts were made to gain a footing for English opera in London, and in 1728 'The Beggar's Opera' achieved a triumph so instantaneous and overwhelming as seriously to affect the success of Handel's Italian enterprise at the Haymarket Theatre. It is supposed, that the origin of 'The Beggar's Opera' is due to a remark of Swift's that 'a Newgate pastoral might be made a pretty thing.' Gay borrowed the idea, and constructed 'The Beggar's Opera' round a cut-throat highwayman of the name of Macheath, while Dr. Pepusch arranged the music from old English and Scotch melodies, together with some of the most popular tunes of the day. The success of the work was very remarkable. It was performed sixty-two times during the first season, and even now is still to be heard occasionally. It was the foundation of that exceedingly simple form of art, the English ballad opera, which was so widely popular in London during the closing years of the eighteenth century, and early in the nineteenth. At first composers availed themselves largely of traditional or popular tunes in arranging the music which diversified the dialogue of these works, but as time went on they became more ambitious, and the operas of Storace and his contemporaries are for the most entirely original.

Meanwhile an attempt had been made by Arne to adapt the mannerisms of the Italian stage to English opera. His 'Artaxerxes,' which was produced in 1762, was constructed strictly upon the lines of Italian opera, being made up throughout entirely of airs and recitative. It had a most encouraging reception, but the enterprise seems to have borne little fruit, for after a few years we hear no more of English opera 'after the Italian manner,' and London seems to have been content with Italian opera and ballad operas of the already familiar type. The traditions of the latter were successfully carried on by Storace, a naturalised Italian, Dibdin, Shield, Hook, and many others, many of whose songs are still popular, though the works of which they once formed part have long been forgotten. The ballad operas of these composers were of unimaginable *naïveté* and depended entirely upon their simple tunefulness for such favour as they won. Sir Henry Bishop (1786-1855) raised the artistic standard of this form of art considerably. There is real musical interest in some of his concerted pieces, and many of his choruses, which are familiar to us under the incorrect name of glees, are capitally written. Had Bishop possessed the necessary energy and enterprise, he might have founded a school of English opera which would have compared favourably even with its continental contemporaries.

To John Barnett (1802-1890) belongs the credit of writing the first English opera, strictly so called, since Arne's 'Artaxerxes.' 'The Mountain Sylph,' which was produced in 1834, fulfils all the requirements of the operatic form. It is besides a work of genuine charm and power, and retained its popularity for many years.

It is unfortunate for the memory of Balfe (1808-1870) that the one opera by which he is now remembered, the perennial 'Bohemian Girl,' should be perhaps the least meritorious of his many works. It lives solely by reason of the insipid tunefulness of one or two airs, regardless of the fact that the plot is transcendently foolish, and that the words are a shining example of the immortal balderdash of the poet Bunn. In the first act Thaddeus, an exiled Polish rebel, finds refuge among

a tribe of gipsies, who disguise him in order to enable him to escape his pursuers. While among them he saves the life of Arline, the six-year-old daughter of Count Arnheim, an Austrian nobleman. Arnheim, in delight at recovering his child, invites Thaddeus and his companion Devilshoof, the leader of the gipsies, to a banquet, at which the Emperor's health is proposed. The two supposed gipsies refuse to drink it, whereupon Devilshoof is seized and imprisoned, while Thaddeus, at the Count's earnest entreaty, is allowed to go in freedom. Devilshoof contrives to make his escape, and in revenge for the treatment he has received steals the little Arline, whom he carries off to the gipsy camp. Twelve years have passed when the second act begins. Arline has grown up to womanhood, but all the other characters remain at precisely the same age as in the first act. Thaddeus loves Arline, and is himself beloved by the gipsy queen, who vows the innocent girl's ruin. By her machinations Arline is accused of theft, and is taken to be tried by her own father. The inevitable recognition ensues, and upon Thaddeus disclosing his true position he is rewarded with Arline's hand. During the betrothal feast the gipsy queen attempts Arline's life, but the shot, in a manner which even Bunn himself might have found difficult to explain, recoils and strikes her who aimed it.

Balfe had to the full his share of that vein of maudlin sentiment which is typical of one side of the Irish character. He appears to have had little ambition, and was content throughout his career to fit his saccharine melodies to whatever words the librettists of the day chose to supply. No one can deny him the possession of fluent and commonplace melody, but there his claim to musicianship ends.

Wallace (1814-1865) was more of a musician than Balfe, but his best-known work, 'Maritana,' is but little superior to 'The Bohemian Girl.' Maritana, a street singer, has attracted the attention of the King of Spain. Don José, one of the courtiers, determines to help the King in his amour, in order that he may afterwards use his infidelity as a means of advancing himself in the favour of the Queen. There is a law against duelling in the streets of Madrid, and a certain spendthrift nobleman, Don Cæsar de Bazan, has rendered himself liable to death for protecting a poor boy named Lazarillo from arrest. Don José promises the condemned man that he shall be shot instead of hanged, if he will consent to marry a veiled lady an hour before the execution, intending thus to give Maritana a position at court as the widow of a nobleman. Don Cæsar consents to the arrangement, but Lazarillo takes the bullets out of the soldiers' rifles, so that the execution does not end fatally, and Maritana is not a widow after all. Don Cæsar finds his way to a villa in the outskirts of Madrid, where he not only has the satisfaction of putting a stop to the King's attentions to Maritana, but performs the same kind office for the Queen, who is being persecuted by Don José. For the latter performance he receives a free pardon, and is made Governor of Valentia. 'Lurline,' an opera constructed upon the Rhenish legend of the Loreley, has perhaps more musical merit than 'Maritana,' but the libretto is more than usually indefinite.

Wallace rivalled Balfe in the facility and shallowness of his melody. Yet with all their weaknesses, his operas contain many tunes which have wound themselves into popular affection, and in the eyes of Bank-Holiday audiences, 'Maritana' stands second only to 'The Bohemian Girl.'

Sir Julius Benedict (1804-1885), though German by birth, may conveniently be classed as an Englishman. Trained in the school of Weber, he was a musician of a very different calibre from Balfe and Wallace. His earlier works, 'The Gipsy's Warning' and 'The Brides of Venice,' are now forgotten, but 'The Lily of Killarney,' which was produced in 1862, is still deservedly popular.

It is founded upon Boucicault's famous drama, 'The Colleen Bawn.' Hardress Cregan, a young Irish landowner, has married Eily O'Connor, a beautiful peasant girl of Killarney. The marriage has been kept secret, and Hardress, finding that an opportunity has arisen of repairing the fallen fortunes of his house by a rich marriage, contemplates repudiating Eily. Eily refuses to part with her 'marriage lines,' whereupon Danny Mann, Hardress's faithful henchman, attempts to drown her in the lake. She is saved by Myles na Coppaleen, a humble lover of her own, who shoots Danny Mann. Eily's narrow escape has the result of bringing Hardress to his senses. He renounces his schemes of ambition, and makes public his marriage with Eily. Benedict's music touches a higher

level than had been reached by English opera before. He was, of course, directly inspired by Weber, but there runs through the opera a vein of plaintive melancholy which is all his own. The form in which 'The Lily of Killarney' is cast is now somewhat superannuated, but for tenderness of melody and unaffected pathos, it will compare very favourably with many more pretentious works which have succeeded it. Sir George Macfarren (1813-1887) was a prolific writer for the stage, but of all his works 'Robin Hood' is the only one which is still occasionally performed. It has little of the buoyancy which the theme demands, but there is a great deal of sound writing in the concerted music, and some of the ballads are tuneful enough in a rather commonplace way. Edward James Loder (1813-1865) was a good musician, and under more favourable conditions might have produced work of permanent interest. His best-known work is 'The Night Dancers,' an opera founded upon the legend which has been used by the Italian composer Puccini in his 'Le Villi.'

About the middle of the nineteenth century the destinies of English opera were controlled by a company presided over by Miss Pyne and Mr. Harrison, for which Balfe and Macfarren wrote a good many of their works. In more recent times the place of this institution was taken by the Carl Rosa company, which was founded in 1875 by a German violinist named Carl Rosa. Such opportunities as were presented to English musicians, during the latter part of the last century, of hearing their works sung upon the stage were principally due to his efforts. One of the first works actually written in response to a commission by Carl Rosa was 'Esmeralda,' an opera by Arthur Goring Thomas (1851-1892), which was produced in 1883. It is founded upon Victor Hugo's 'Notre Dame,' and the libretto was written by T. Marzials and A. Randegger.

Esmeralda, a gipsy street singer, is loved by the profligate priest Claude Frollo, who with the assistance of Quasimodo, the deformed bell-ringer of Notre Dame, tries to carry her off by night. She is rescued by Phoebus de Châteaupers, the captain of the guard, who speedily falls in love with her. Frollo escapes, but Quasimodo is captured, though, at Esmeralda's entreaty, Phoebus sets him once more at liberty. In gratitude the dwarf vows himself to her service. Frollo is mad with rage at seeing Phoebus preferred to himself; he assassinates the captain and accuses Esmeralda of the crime. She is condemned to death, but is saved by the appearance of Phoebus, who was not killed after all, and opportunely turns up in time to rescue Esmeralda. Frollo attempts once more to murder Phoebus, but the blow is received instead by Quasimodo, who sacrifices himself for Esmeralda's happiness. When the opera was produced in French at Covent Garden in 1890, the composer introduced several alterations into the score. An elaborate air for Esmeralda in the prison was the most important of the additions, and the close of the opera was also materially changed. It was generally thought, however, that the original version was the more successful. Thomas's training and sympathies were thoroughly French, and except for the words 'Esmeralda' has very little claim to be called an English opera. The score is extremely graceful and charming, and it is only at the more dramatic moments that the composer fails to do justice to his theme.

In 'Nadeshda,' an opera written upon a Russian subject, which was produced in 1885, there was much charming music, but the libretto was uninteresting, and the success of the work never equalled that of its predecessor. The most attractive part of the opera was the delightfully quaint and original ballet music, to which local colour was given by clever orchestration and ingenious use of Russian rhythms.

To the initiative of the Carl Rosa company was due the production of Mr. Frederick Corder's 'Nordisa,' a work of undoubted talent though suffering from a fatal lack of homogeneity, and of two operas by Sir Alexander Mackenzie. The first of these, 'Colomba,' was produced in 1883. It achieved a success, but the gloomy character of the libretto prevented it from becoming really popular. It is founded upon Prosper Mérimée's famous Corsican tale. The father of Orso and Colomba della Rebbia has been treacherously murdered by two of the family of Barracini. Colomba is burning for vengeance, but her brother is an officer in the French army, and has been absent from Corsica for many years. When he returns she finds that his love for Lydia, the daughter of the Count de Nevers, has driven thoughts of revenge from his mind. She succeeds, however, in rousing him to action, and one day he kills both the murderers, though wounded himself by a cowardly ambush. He has to take to the mountains for refuge, and there he remains,

tended by Lydia and Colomba, until news of his pardon comes. It is too late, however, to save the life of Colomba, who has been mortally wounded in endeavouring to divert the soldiers from Orso's hiding-place. Mackenzie's music is exceedingly clever and effective. He uses guiding themes with judgment and skill, and his employment of some old Corsican melodies is also very happy. 'Colomba' is a work which eminently merits revival, and it will be probably heard of again. 'The Troubadour,' which was produced a few years later, failed completely. The story is thoroughly dull, and completely failed to inspire the musician. Sir Alexander Mackenzie has recently completed the score of an opera on the subject of Dickens's 'Cricket on the Hearth,' the production of which is awaited with much interest.

During the closing years of the nineteenth century the fortunes of English opera, never very brilliant, reached a lower point than at any time in our musical history. The Carl Rosa opera company fell upon evil days, and was compelled to restrict its energies almost entirely to the performance of stock operas, while at Covent Garden the opportunities afforded to native composers were few and far between. In these disheartening circumstances it is not surprising that English musicians were not encouraged to devote their powers to a form of art in which so little prospect of success could be entertained. What they might have achieved under happier conditions the operatic career of Sir Charles Stanford suggests in the most convincing manner. Stanford is a composer whose natural endowment conspicuously fits him for operatic work, and he has grasped such opportunities as have been vouchsafed to him with almost unvarying success. Had he been blessed with a more congenial environment he would have taken rank with the foremost operatic composers of his time.

His first opera, 'The Veiled Prophet,' was originally performed at Hanover in 1881, but was not actually heard in London until it was produced at Covent Garden in 1894. The libretto, an admirable condensation of Moore's well-known poem from the pen of Mr. W. Barclay Squire, gave the composer ample opportunities for picturesque and dramatic effect. Stanford's music is tuneful and vigorous throughout, and such weaknesses as are occasionally perceptible are due rather to inexperience of the stage than to any failure in inspiration.

'The Canterbury Pilgrims,' written to a libretto by Gilbert à Beckett, which was produced in 1884, was happily named by some one at the time an English 'Meistersinger,' and indeed it is not difficult to imagine what model Stanford had in his mind when writing his brilliant and genial opera. Geoffrey, the host of the Tabard Inn, has a pretty daughter named Cicely, who is loved by the jovial apprentice, Hubert. Geoffrey finds out their attachment, and determines to send Cicely upon a visit to an aunt in Kent, in company with a body of pilgrims who are just starting for Canterbury. Sir Christopher Synge, a knight of Kent, has cast sheep's eyes upon the pretty girl, and hearing of her intended trip bids his factotum, Hal o' the Chepe, assemble a company of ragamuffins, and carry her off on her way to Canterbury. Hubert contrives to get enlisted among them, so as to be able to watch over his sweetheart, and Dame Margery, Sir Christopher's wife, also in disguise, joins the pilgrims, in the hope of keeping an eye upon her errant spouse. In the second act the pilgrims arrive at Sidenbourne. Dame Margery helps the lovers to escape, and taking Cicely's place receives the vows and sighs of her husband. In the third act the lovers have been overtaken and caught by the irate Geoffrey, and Hubert is dragged to trial before Sir Christopher. After an amusing trial scene, the knight discovers that Cicely is one of the culprits, and at once pardons them both. Geoffrey is persuaded to forgive the young couple, and all ends happily. Stanford's music is a happy compromise between old and new. In his use of guiding themes, and in his contrapuntal treatment of the orchestra he follows Wagner, but his employment of new devices is tempered by due regard for established tradition. He is happiest in dealing with humorous situations, and in the lighter parts of the opera his music has a bustling gaiety which fits the situation very happily. In the more passionate scenes he is less at home, and the love duet in particular is by no means entirely satisfactory. Stanford's next work, 'Savonarola,' was performed in London for the first time by a German company under Dr. Hans Richter in 1884. Interesting as much of the music is, the performance was not successful, partly owing to the almost unmitigated gloom of the libretto. Far the best part of the work, both musically and dramatically, is the prologue,

which tells of the love of Savonarola for Clarice, of her marriage, and of his renouncement of the world. The merit of this scene is so great that it might be worth the composer's while to produce it as a one-act opera, in which form it would be safe to predict for it a genuine success.

Stanford's next work for the stage was 'Shamus O'Brien,' a romantic opera dealing with a typically Irish subject, which was produced in 1896 with great success. The form of the work is that of a genuine comic opera, the dialogue being interspersed throughout with music, but although less ambitious in form than his earlier works, 'Shamus O'Brien' has a deeper artistic importance. With all its cleverness and ingenuity, 'The Canterbury Pilgrims' is German in method and expression, and it is merely by the accident of language that it can be classed as British opera at all. In 'Shamus O'Brien' the composer drew his inspiration from the melodies and rhythms of his native Ireland, and the result is that his work ranks as an original and independent effort, instead of being merely a brilliant exercise.

In 1901 Sir Charles Stanford's 'Much Ado about Nothing' was produced at Covent Garden. The libretto by Julian Sturgis is a clever adaptation of Shakespeare's comedy, in which the action is judiciously compressed into four scenes without any incidents of importance being omitted. First we have the ball at Leonato's house, with some love-making for Claudio and Hero, and a wit-combat between Beatrice and Benedick. Here, too, Don John hatches his plot against Hero's honour, and Don Pedro unfolds his scheme for tricking Beatrice and Benedick into mutual love. The second act takes place in Leonato's garden. Claudio serenades his mistress, who comes down from her balcony and joins him in a duet. Then follows the cozening of Benedick, and the act ends effectively by Don John showing to Claudio the supposed Hero admitting Borachio to her chamber. The third scene is in the church, following Shakespeare very closely, and the last takes place in an open square in Messina with Hero's tomb on one side, where, after a scene with Dogberry, Borachio confesses his crime, and Hero is restored to her lover. Stanford's music is a masterly combination of delicate fancy and brilliant humour, and when serious matters are in hand he is not found wanting. A distinctive feature of the work is the absence of Wagnerian influence. Stanford uses guiding themes, it is true, and often in a most suggestive manner, but they do not form the basis of his score. If foreign influence there be in 'Much Ado about Nothing,' it is that of Verdi in his 'Falstaff' manner. Like Verdi Stanford strikes a true balance between voices and instruments. His orchestra prattles merrily along, underlining each situation in turn with happy emphasis, but it never attempts to dethrone the human voice from its pride of place. Like the blithe Beatrice, 'Much Ado about Nothing' was born under a star that danced. It overflows with delicious melody, and its orchestration is the *ne plus ultra* of finished musicianship. Since its production in London it has been performed with great success in the provinces by the Moody-Manners opera company, and has lately been produced in Germany.

Dr. Frederic Cowen is another of our English musicians who, in more favourable circumstances, would doubtless have proved himself an operatic composer of distinction. 'Pauline,' a work founded upon 'The Lady of Lyons,' which was played by the Carl Rosa company in 1876, seems to have won little success. 'Thorgrim,' produced by the same company in 1889, was more fortunate. The plot is founded upon an Icelandic saga, and has but little dramatic interest. There is much charm in Dr. Cowen's music, and some of the lighter scenes in the opera are gracefully treated, but his talent is essentially delicate rather than powerful, and the fierce passions of the Vikings scarcely come within its scope.

'Signa' (1893), an opera founded upon Ouida's novel of that name, showed traces of Italian influence. It was produced at Milan with considerable success, and was afterwards given in London. In 'Harold' (1895), Dr. Cowen attempted too ambitious a task. The tale of the conquest of England was ill suited to his delicate muse, and the opera achieved little more than a *succès d'estime*.

Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842-1900) was the most successful English composer of opera during the later years of the nineteenth century. His name is of course principally associated with the long series of light operas written in conjunction with Mr. W.S. Gilbert; but it must not be forgotten that

he also essayed grand opera with no little success.

The experiment made by the Carl Rosa company in 1899 of playing his early oratorio, 'The Martyr of Antioch,' as an opera had, not unnaturally, very little success, but 'Ivanhoe' (1891) showed that Sullivan could adapt his style to the exigencies of grand opera with singular versatility. 'Ivanhoe' was handicapped by a patchy and unequal libretto, but it contained a great deal of good music, and we have probably not heard the last of it yet. For the present generation, however, Sullivan's fame rests almost entirely upon his comic operas, which indeed have already attained something like the position of classics and may prove, it is sincerely to be hoped, the foundation of that national school of opera which has been so often debated and so ardently desired, but is still, alas! so far from practical realisation.

Sullivan's first essay in comic opera dates from the year 1867, which saw the production of his 'Contrabandista' and 'Cox and Box,' both written to libretti by Sir Frank Burnand, and both showing not merely admirable musicianship and an original vein of melody, but an irresistible sense of humour and a rare faculty for expressing it in music. 'Thespis' (1871) first brought him into partnership with Mr. Gilbert, a partnership which was further cemented by 'Trial by Jury' (1875). It was 'Trial by Jury' that opened the eyes of connoisseurs to the possibilities lying within the grasp of these two young men, whose combined talents had produced a work so entirely without precedent in the history of English or indeed of any music. The promise of 'Trial by Jury' was amply borne out by 'The Sorcerer' (1877), which remains in the opinion of many the best of the whole series of Gilbert and Sullivan operas—but indeed there is hardly one of them that has not at one time or another been preferred above its fellows by expert opinion. 'The Sorcerer' naturally gave Sullivan more scope than 'Trial by Jury.' Here for the first time he showed what he could do in what may be called his old English vein, in reproduction of the graceful dance measures of old time, and in imitations of Elizabethan madrigals so fresh and tuneful that they seem less the resuscitation of a style long dead than the creation of an entirely new art-form. In a different vein was the burlesque incantation, a masterpiece of musical humour, in which the very essence of Mr. Gilbert's strange topsy-turvydom seems transmuted into sound.

In 'H.M.S. Pinafore' (1878) Sullivan scored his first great popular success. 'The Sorcerer' had appealed to the few; 'Pinafore' carried the masses by storm. In humour and in musicianship alike it is less subtle than its predecessor, but it triumphed by sheer dash and high spirits. There is a smack of the sea in music and libretto alike. 'Pinafore' was irresistible, and Sullivan became the most popular composer of the day. 'The Pirates of Penzance' (1880) followed the lines of 'Pinafore,' with humour perhaps less abundant but with an added touch of refinement. There are passages in 'The Pirates' tenderer in tone, one might almost say more pathetic, than anything Sullivan had previously written, passages which gave more than a hint of the triumphs he was later to win in that mingling of tears and laughter of which he had the secret. In 'Patience' (1881) musician and librettist mutually agreed to leave the realm of farcical extravagance, and to turn to satire of a peculiarly keen-edged and delicate kind—that satire which caresses while it cuts, and somehow contrives to win sympathy for its object even when it is most mordant. There are people nowadays who have been known to declare that the "æsthetic" movement had no existence outside the imagination of Mr. Gilbert and 'Mr. Punch.' In the eighties, however, everybody believed in it, and believed too that 'Patience' killed it. What is quite certain is that, whoever killed it, 'Patience' embalmed it in odours and spices of the most fragrant and costly description, so that it has remained a thing of beauty even to our own day. In 'Iolanthe' (1882) Mr. Gilbert reached the dizziest height of topsy-turvydom to which he ever climbed, and set Sullivan to solve what was perhaps the most difficult problem of his whole career. To bring the atmosphere of fairyland into the House of Lords was a task which the most accomplished master of musical satire might well have refused, but Sullivan came victoriously through the ordeal. His 'Iolanthe' music, with its blending of things ærial with things terrene, and its contrast between the solid qualities of our hereditary legislators and the irresponsible ecstasy of fairyland is one of the most surprising feats of musical imagination that even his career can furnish. In 'Princess Ida' (1884), which is, so to speak, a burlesque of a burlesque, his task was easier. 'Princess Ida' contains some of his most brilliant excursions into the



realm of parody—parodies of grand opera, parodies of the traditional Handelian manner, parodies of sentimental love-making—but it also contains some of the purest and most beautiful music he ever wrote. Some of Sullivan's melodies, indeed, would be more fitting on the lips of Tennyson's romantic princess than on those of Mr. Gilbert's burlesque "suffragette". 'Princess Ida' was not appreciated at its true value and still awaits its revenge, but in 'The Mikado' (1885) the two collaborators scored the greatest success of their career. The freshness and novelty of its surroundings—Japan had not then, so to speak, become the property of the man in the street—counted for something in the triumph of 'The Mikado,' but it is unquestionably one of the very best of the series. Mr. Gilbert never wrote wittier or more brilliant dialogue, and Sullivan never dazzled his admirers by more astonishing feats of musicianship. 'Ruddigore' (1887) was less successful than any of its predecessors. If the satire of 'Princess Ida' was just a shade above the heads of the Savoy audience, the satire of 'Ruddigore' was perhaps a shade below them. 'Ruddigore' is a burlesque of transpontine melodrama, and a very good burlesque too; but the Savoy audience knew next to nothing about transpontine melodrama, and so the satire was missed and the piece fell flat. It was a pity, because Sullivan's music was in his happiest manner. There may yet, however, be a future for 'Ruddigore,' 'The Yeomen of the Guard' (1888) opened fresh ground. For the moment Mr. Gilbert turned his back upon topsy-turvydom and Sullivan approached the frontiers of grand opera.

'The Yeomen of the Guard' has a serious plot, and at times lingers on the threshold of tragedy. Sullivan caught the altered spirit of his collaborator with perfect sympathy, and struck a note of romantic feeling unique in his career. With 'The Gondoliers' (1889) the scene brightened again, and merriment reigned supreme once more. Perhaps at times there was a suspicion of weariness in Mr. Gilbert's wit, and some of Sullivan's melodies had not all the old distinction of manner, but the piece was an incarnation of liveliness and gaiety, and its success rivalled the historic glories of 'The Mikado.' With 'The Gondoliers' came the first solution of continuity in the Gilbert and Sullivan partnership. Differences arose; Mr. Gilbert retired from the councils of the Savoy Theatre, and Sullivan had to look out for a new collaborator. He found one in Mr. Sydney Grundy, and their 'Haddon Hall' was produced in 1892. In spite of charming music, reflecting very gracefully the old English atmosphere of the story, its success was only moderate, and the world of music was much relieved to hear that the differences between Mr. Gilbert and the Savoy authorities had been adjusted, and that the two famous collaborators were to join forces once more. Unfortunately 'Utopia' (1893) echoed but faintly the magical harmonies of the past. The old enchantment was gone; the spell was shattered. Both collaborators seemed to have lost the clue that had so often led to triumph. Again they drifted apart, and Sullivan turned once more to his old friend, Sir Frank Burnand. Together they produced 'The Chieftain' (1894), a revised and enlarged version of their early indiscretion, 'The Contrabandista.' Success still held aloof, and for the last time Sullivan and Mr. Gilbert joined forces. In 'The Grand Duke' (1896) there were fitful gleams of the old splendour, notably in an amazing sham—Greek chorus, which no one but Sullivan could have written, but the piece could not for a moment be compared to even the weakest of the earlier operas. The fate of 'The Beauty Stone' (1898), written to a libretto by Messrs Pinero and Comyns Carr, was even more deplorable. Fortunately Sullivan's collaboration with Captain Basil Hood brought him an Indian summer of inspiration and success. 'The Rose of Persia' (1900), if not upon the level of his early masterpieces, contained better music than he had written since the days of 'The Gondoliers,' and at least one number—the marvellous Dervish quartet—that for sheer invention and musicianship could hardly be matched even in 'The Mikado' itself. There was a great deal of charming music, too, in 'The Emerald Isle' (1901), which Sullivan left unfinished at his death, and Mr. Edward German completed.

During his lifetime, Sullivan was called the English Auber by people who wanted to flatter him, and the English Offenbach by people who wanted to snub him. Neither was a very happy nickname. He might more justly have been called the English Lortzing, since he undoubtedly learnt more than a little from the composer of 'Czar und Zimmermann,' whose comic operas he heard during his student days at Leipzig. But Sullivan owed very little to anyone. His genius was thoroughly his own and thoroughly English, and in that lies his real value to posterity. For if we are

ever to have a national English opera, we shall get it by writing English music, not by producing elaborate exercises in the manner of Wagner, Verdi, Massenet, Strauss, or anybody else. Most great artistic enterprises spring from humble sources, and our young lions need not be ashamed of producing a mere comic opera or two before attacking a full-fledged music-drama. Did not Wagner himself recommend a budding bard to start his musical career with a Singspiel? It is safest as a rule to begin building operations from the foundation, and a better foundation for a school of English opera than Sullivan's series of comic operas could hardly be desired.

In his younger days Sullivan had many disciples. Alfred Cellier, the composer of the world-famous 'Dorothy,' was the best of them. Edward Solomon was hardly more than a clever imitator. The mantle of Sullivan seems now to have fallen on Mr. Edward German, who besides completing Sullivan's unfinished 'Emerald Isle,' won brilliant success with his enchanting 'Merrie England.' His 'Princess of Kensington' was saddled with a dull libretto, but the music was hardly inferior to that of its predecessor, and much the same may be said of his latest work 'Tom Jones.'

The recent performances of English composers in the field of grand opera have not been very encouraging. Few indeed are the opportunities offered to our native musicians of winning distinction on the lyric stage, and of late we have been regaled with the curious spectacle of English composers setting French or German libretti in the hope of finding in foreign theatres the hearing that is denied them in their own. Miss Ethel Smyth is the most prominent and successful of the composers whose reputation has been made abroad. Her 'Fantasio' has not been given in England, but 'Der Wald,' an opera in one act, after having been produced in Germany was given at Covent Garden in 1902 with conspicuous success. The libretto, which is the work of the composer herself, is concise and dramatic. Heinrich the forester loves Röschen, the woodman's daughter, but on the eve of their marriage he has the misfortune to attract the notice of Iolanthe, the mistress of his liege lord the Landgrave Rudolf. He rejects her advances, and in revenge she has him stabbed by her followers. This is the bare outline of the story, but the value of the work lies in the highly poetical and imaginative framework in which it is set. Behind the puny passions of man looms the vast presence of the eternal forest, the mighty background against which the children of earth fret their brief hour and pass into oblivion. The note which echoes through the drama is struck in the opening scene—a tangled brake deep in the heart of the great stillness, peopled by nymphs and fauns whose voices float vaguely through the twilight. Every scene in the drama is tinged with the same mysterious influence, until at the close the spirit-voices chant their primeval hymn over the bodies of the lovers in the gathering night. Miss Smyth's music has the same mastering unity. The voice of the forest is the keynote of her score. Perhaps it can hardly be said that she has altogether succeeded in translating into music the remarkable conception which is the foundation of her libretto. Had she done so, she might at once have taken her place by the side of Wagner, the only composer of modern times who has handled a philosophical idea of this kind in music with any notable success. But her music has an individual strain of romance, which stamps her as a composer of definite personality, while in the more dramatic scenes she shows a fine grip of the principles of stage effect. Her latest work 'Strandrecht,' in English 'The Wreckers' (1906), was produced at Leipzig, and shortly afterwards was given at Prague. It has not yet found its way to London. The scene is laid in Cornwall in the eighteenth century. The inhabitants of that wild coast, though fervent Methodists, live by 'wrecking,' in which they are encouraged by their minister. Thurza, the minister's faithless wife, alone protests against their cruelty and hypocrisy, and persuades her lover, a young fisherman, to light fires in order to warn mariners from the dangerous coast. The treachery, as it seems to the rest of the villagers, of Thurza and her lover is discovered, and after a rough-and-ready trial they are left in a cavern close to the sea to be overwhelmed by the rising tide. Miss Smyth's music is spoken of as strongly dramatic, and marked by a keen sense of characterisation.

The operas of Mr. Isidore de Lara, a composer who, in spite of his name, is said to be of English extraction, may conveniently be mentioned here. It is generally understood that the production of these works at Covent Garden was due to causes other than their musical value, but in any case they do not call for detailed criticism. Mr. de Lara's earlier works, 'The Light of Asia,' 'Amy Robsart,'

and 'Moina' failed completely. There is better work in 'Messaline' (1899). The musical ideas are poor in quality, but the score is put together in a workmanlike manner, and the orchestration is often clever. The libretto, which recounts the intrigues of the Empress Messalina with two brothers, Hares and Helion, a singer and a gladiator, is in the highest degree repellent, and it would need far better music than Mr. de Lara's to reconcile a London audience to so outrageous a subject. Mr. de Lara's latest production, 'Sanga' (1906), does not seem to have sustained the promise of 'Messaline.' Another composer whom necessity has driven to ally his music to a foreign libretto is Mr. Herbert Bunning, whose opera 'La Princesse Osra' was produced at Covent Garden in 1902. Mr. Alick Maclean, whose 'Quentin Durward' and 'Petruccio' had already shown remarkable promise, has lately won considerable success in Germany with 'Die Liebesgeige.'

Scanty is the catalogue of noteworthy operas with English words produced in recent years. The most remarkable of them are Mr. Colin MacAlpin's 'The Cross and the Crescent,' which won the prize offered by Mr. Charles Manners in 1903 for an English opera, and Mr. Nicholas Gatty's 'Greysteel,' a very able and musicianly setting of an episode from one of the Norse sagas, which was produced at Sheffield in 1906.

It is difficult to be sanguine as to the prospects of English opera. Circumstances are certainly against the production of original work in this country, though it is legitimate to hope that the recent revival of interest in Sullivan's works may lead our composers to devote their energies to the higher forms of comic opera. Anything is better than the mere imitation of foreign models which has for so long been characteristic of English opera. By turning to the melodies of his native land, Weber founded German opera, and if we are ever to have a school of opera in England we must begin by building upon a similar foundation.

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