

andra Palace and the cloud of disappointment which begins to hover over the competitive choral movement. Some folk had expected that every gain in choral technic could be transferred to ordinary choral composition. The fact is that beyond a certain point choral complexity turns to mud, like the mingling of too many coloured pigments. If men and women are to meet and make music together in considerable numbers, they must bring with them the hearts of children and sing with a childlike simplicity. That principle must be recognised in all festival work. It is enunciated most definitely in *Parsifal* by the greatest master of musical colour and complexity.

Chapter III.

ATTENTION has been drawn by certain writers to the varying musical characteristics of the dramas of Wagner. *The Ring* is all of a piece in its elemental passion and splendour; *Tristan* is a masterpiece of spiritualised sensuality; *The Mastersingers* stands for that quality of jollity and sane sentimentality which we at once recognise as typically German. And these characteristics, of course, give distinctive quality to the music of each separate work: though they sometimes have a common ground in detail, the music evolved from the one could never serve for the other. Thus, the final scene of *The Dusk of the Gods*

has obvious affinity with the final scene of *Tristan and Isolde*: in both works the woman rings down the curtain upon the corpse of her lover; in both works Love is proclaimed as the saving power; in both works there is a kind of emotional transfiguration consequent on the waves on waves of passion which lift us from reflecting upon the presence of the body to a glory beyond. So far these two dramatic moments are similar not only in outward show, but also in the quality and shaping power of the music.

But yet we could not endure the thought of transposing the music from one to the other! And this not merely because we might weakly shrink from an act of vandalism (and vandalism is an awful thing in the mind of vandals), not even because the thematic tissue of the one could by no manner of means be woven in with the other.

The real reason of the impossibility of this transposition would become apparent if we proposed to draw up a concert programme of Wagnerian snippets and place these two scenes in juxtaposition.

I have often thought that I would give a lecture on Wagner's heroines with musical examples. In that case, a cold-blooded analysis could tolerate such a juxtaposition; but it would be far removed from an artistic or even a decently human procedure. The effect made by the death of Brünhilde is that of a noble primitive character, a real daughter of the aristocracy of blood; and her behaviour causes one to realise something of the defiant fear of death. But that fear has been overcome by Isolde; and so there is not half so much pathos in her death. Tristan has taught her the message of hope. And as Isolde is to Brünhilde, so is Kundry to Isolde. And as the music of *Tristan* is to that of *The Dusk of the Gods*, so is the music of *Parsifal* to that of *Tristan*. The ascend-

ing spirituality of Wagner's mind expressed itself in his dramatic ideas of love and death, and therefore in the music which issued from those ideas.

The conception of *Tristan and Isolde* is a story of the evolution of the human mind as it passes from simple physical love to an idea of the spiritual rapture which may come to be associated with it, and perhaps continue when the means of physical love fall into decay. That is why the music of *Tristan* has revolted those many English people who cannot conceive that physical love may develop into anything but a baby. But it was only through that physical conception that Wagner reached the more etherial thought of *Parsifal*; and the music of *Parsifal* can only be properly understood in that realisation. When it is properly understood, we shall cease to hear any more Nietzschean nonsense about it. I do not stop to controvert the nonsense now, because I sometimes feel like that myself, and because English people are so largely shamefacedly Nietzschean in behaviour as to fear their own clean-lipped prophet even more than the spoof-and-spook Christianity they pretend to read into *Parsifal*.

Let us get on to the emotional reality of the music-drama, more especially as it is revealed in terms of choral and orchestral colour. The reason I do not propose to rely so much upon its thematic tissue is because, as already pointed out, the melodic values of the work are comparatively negligible. Melody is a shaping force of music, especially in relation to suggestions of material things.* But chord-colour and instrumental combinations are stronger to evoke mystical ideas; and it is with these last that Wagner

* The reader who read my articles on *The Pictorial Element in Music* (see *Musical Opinion*, February to November, 1912) will recall the realistic values of the different elements of music.

is inevitably concerned in *Parsifal*. That is why the work contains less musical realism, and more nearly approximates to the drama of a primitive religious ritual.

However, we must be quite clear in our minds as to that rightful and beautiful musical realism which follows upon the symbolic use of material things. Thus Siegfried's sword stands for his courage, and the so-called Sword Theme is much more suggestive of valorous emotion than the appearance of the weapon. Wherever, as in that case, a thing stands for some real feeling vital to the development of the drama, Wagner instinctively found a theme for the feeling and not a mere analogy and apology for pictorial art. But when he had to deal with some stage effect, he did not always leave the picture to the art of stage craft, but rather weakened the effect by attempts at realism in the music. *Parsifal* itself offers examples of both right and wrong.

As Siegfried's sword is the symbol of courage, so Parsifal's spear is the symbol of irony,—cruel in the hands of the unloving Klingsor, dangerous in the hands of the incompetent Amfortas, only rightly to be used by the simpleton, who of course can but use it unconsciously. The only possible use of irony among decent people is when with an unhating heart attention is drawn to the absurdity of suffering. That is the world's great woe; and Wagner expresses it,—not by a silly faked photograph of an impossible spear but by music which cries aloud in its suffering:—



This is the theme which penetrated the joy of Tristan and Isolde before they had found the real rapture of their love. This is the theme which runs through *Parsifal* as the red thread of human suffering runs through all yearnings of spiritual desire. And to be convinced that this music is to be associated with the woe and not the spear, one has only to turn to moments like the appearance of Klingsor at the end of Act II., or the healing of Amfortas, where one finds quite another music associated with the weapon. It is the use of the weapon of irony which makes it devilish, or silly, or effectual as the case may be ; and he only who can wield it rightfully is the simple constructive mind, the artist,—Parsifal.

But if Wagner was always right when he was guided by his musical intuitions, so much cannot always be allowed when it was a question of stage effect. A case in point occurs when Klingsor hurls the spear at Parsifal. It is an inevitable moment in the unfolding of the drama. It shows how a nasty sneering spirit tries to injure a simple creative spirit by means of ridicule ; and how it is bound to miss its mark and leave the mastery of the situation with the very one whom it was intended to injure. And so the spear finds itself in Parsifal's own hand.

Unfortunately, to manage this successfully on the stage would mean a fairly long training in jugglery for the artists concerned ; so to ensure that the sorcerer's sarcasm shall not gouge out one of poor Parsifal's eyes, the spear has to be trained to run along a wire at about the rate of a mile a day and hover in tame fashion over the sainted head of the hero. That is one of the moments which give the enemy his chance ; and to make it worse, Wagner concentrates all his efforts on making us *see* the act rather than feel

its meaning. The composer makes the dithering violins mock the quivering spear:—



Instead of causing us to feel the weakness and even humour of the angry schemer's doings, we are obliged (even by the music) to look upon Parsifal as something of a prig and a *poseur*. Luckily, such ineptitudes occur very seldom. The real power of the drama depends on just that inner mystic side which does not lend itself to stagery, but rather to a deep-lying mysticism generally expressed by Wagner in terms of harmony and orchestration.

Already we have quoted two examples of the use of the spear or World's-woe theme. Let us now follow it up with a few more instances to see what changes of mood are revealed in relation to it by means of a varying rhythmic vibration and harmonic sub-structure. This procedure will be the more interesting because the theme does not apparently lend itself to any considerable range of development, to which fact the very great number of repetitions of the same theme in *Tristan* testifies.

The first use of a distinctive theme in the course of a music-drama is of course the most important. All the thematic material of a prelude or an overture exists merely as emotional preparation and can have no definite relation to the drama. It is when a rhythm or a phrase or a theme is first used in direct connection with a concept or situation that it is fixed in the minds of the hearer for good and all. Whether

it is the old-time memories evoked for the aged by the tunes of their childhood, or the sense of symphonic form resulting from recapitulation, or the value of leading themes in drama as systematised by Wagner, it is always the first use and connection which decides what kind of ideas or moods shall be aroused by its subsequent use.

The Woe-theme is first heard when Gurnemanz refers to the fact that Amfortas, the Lord of the Grail, the dispenser of spiritual power, is himself the slave of sickness.



The next example of its use has been already quoted in this chapter. It occurs after a considerable interval of time; and it is a point worthy of attention that Wagner does not think it worth his while to enforce its *first* dramatic use upon the hearer by any development or emphasis. I think this is due to the fact that it had already been so largely employed by him in *Tristan* and even in *The Ring of the Nibelungs*. In fact, all Wagner's dramas are so much of a piece that (as Bernard Shaw says of Ibsen's plays) one takes up the story of human development at the point where the previous one lays it down; and just as we are not likely to understand the meaning of *Parsifal* unless we have thoroughly gripped the philosophy of the earlier works, so also the music of this last drama will have a much more intense application

if we have already lived through the emotional connotations of those themes which consciously or unconsciously are drawn from the past creative experiences of the composer.

Nevertheless, we must not go phrase hunting. The student who collects all the phrases which look like first, second and third cousins upon music paper is on as much of a fool's errand as the critic who lives on the discovery of plagiarisms.

Take, for instance, the beautiful tune which is associated with the healing influence of Nature:—



There is a measureable rhythmic and melodic relation between a part of this tune and the World's-woe theme; but in every vital sense they have as little relationship as the cornfields and pinewoods have with the self-torturing mind of a weak or idle man.

Some years ago, I remember reading a treatise by a distinguished British musician who claimed that sooner or later the connection between music-making and emotion would be reduced to rule and the music of the future made upon a safe and scientific plan. I commend to his notice the visible affinity

and audible antipathy between the two themes just quoted.

When Gurnemanz tells of the seduction of Amfortas by Kundry, the World's-woe theme is heard in the following form:—



while the rankling of the wound in the side of Amfortas is recalled in these bars:—



In these two examples Wagner throws new light upon the idea by means of details distinct from the main theme; in the one case the helpless downfall of the basses makes us feel how hopelessly unequal to his trust was Amfortas, in the other a poignant harmony and a palpitating rhythm reveal his subsequent remorse. But two other quotations will throw a much clearer light upon the application of the theme:—



Here we have the theme as first we had it in the prelude; it takes its woeful place in the whole tragedy of the drama, even as by the common everyday life of the world we are moved to thoughts which can no more exclude irony than they can exclude compassion. In such a way is it accepted as part of the mental life by simple passive people like Gurnemanz. When such a man speaks of the inevitable crucifixion of the leaders of the world, he gathers it up into a broad simple conception which includes also the steadfastness and tender yearning of the crucified ones. Pity charged with a sense of the folly of human-kind is not only to be found in the writings of accepted thinkers: it is the emotional philosophy of the average human being. One need not go to Spinoza or Schopenhauer for it; it is a common frame of mind in Fleet Street, Chelsea, and the New Cut. So it is that, when Gurnemanz tells the pitiful tale of one who suffered because he loved, Wagner gathers up the World's-woe theme with the other issues of life, the spiritual desire and onward striving; thus the irony sinks into its place and gives to the whole a healthy flavour, such as a touch of acid gives to an otherwise entirely sweet and serious thing.

But when Amfortas has to do with the same issue a very different music results:—



Amfortas has lived beyond the simplicity of a Gurnemanz and failed; for him the acid has overwhelmed

the sweetness of life: he tried to soar with a broken wing. And so, as this incapable priest of divine mystery strives with his duty, he can but pile one torture on another. That irony which is but a passing word for the folk of the streets and fields, is the bitterness of eternity for them who fail in high places.

A similar musical use of the theme occurs in the second act when the kiss of Kundry brings to Parsifal's mind the memory of Amfortas's failure; whereas towards the end of the act there is no such musical allusion when the spear is mentioned: while at the end of the act, when the spear-symbol is used by Parsifal, the music of pain is entirely obliterated. The power of irony, a devil's instrument in the hands of weakness or malice, becomes a royal sceptre in the hands of the childlike. And that is why Mr. Bernard Shaw is a more effective religious force than the Archbishop of Canterbury and a more effective political force than Mr. Asquith; he can help us to see the folly of our sins and the stupidity of our politics without causing pain to a single individual. So, as Wagner foretells in *Parsifal*, do the Church and State of the Future depend upon the simple hearted artist.