

gion and womankind. When Palestrina, Fra Angelico and Dante were heads of the Christian Church, the mysteries of life were less dark than in later times; and, as a great modern dramatist has well said, "the modern stage is the modern pulpit." And when Kundry really dies, it will not be women who vanish, leaving behind a world of monasticism: it will be the domestic woman who disappears, leaving a world less bothered by sexual problems, because realising the instinctive nature and therefore the "purity" of sex. True, on the stage Kundry's death deprives the world of its last woman. Was Wagner such an imbecile that it must be taken literally? He was a man, and necessarily and rightly wrote from a man's point of view, demanding to be freed from the domestic woman, with her tyranny, her blackmail and her meannesses. Had he been a woman he would have made the demand from the other side, and required to be set free from the vanity, brutality and grossness of the domestic man.

## Chapter V.

**P**ARSIFAL is a prophecy as well as an epitome. It not only sums up the musico-dramatic wisdom of the past—including the immediate past of Wagner's own contributions—but also points the way in a certain measure towards the inevitable future of music-drama. It is not alone in this. From the last act of *Siegfried* to the end of his labours, Wagner was possessed by a new attitude which was often at variance with his earlier practice and theory as well.

During his first period, he used dramatic methods for the sake of his need for musical expression. During his middle period, he tried to reverse that natural order of things and cause the drama to become the spring-board from which some sort of musical expression might be launched. But, finally, he was brought to realise that his earlier and unconscious attitude was the more natural and creative of the two. Music-drama is not a drama "underlined" or emphasized by means of music: it is a drama which cannot get to the hearts of the audience except in terms of music. It is the most primitive form of communal art and the most primitive form of religious worship. It is the principle of Greek tragedy in a much deeper sense than that stated by Wagner himself. It is the inevitable demand for expression of man's mystic sense.

In spite of all the follies, superstitions and cruelties of the past, there is something tremendous and exalting about the metaphysical bent of the human mind that no science seems able to quench or to satisfy. The priestly Amfortases of the past have done something to serve that sense, but have generally lost their spiritual insight in their quest for temporal power. The scientific Klingsors of the past have made for ever impossible the pretensions of ecclesiasticism; but in proving the values of their mechanics they have stultified themselves for the simple person by ignoring the mystery and beauty and inspiration of a Great Machinist. And so *Parsifal* is given us to proclaim the principle inherent in every great artist's work and very evident from the beginning in Wagner's,—the principle that art is the great book of revelation and artists the chief, perhaps the only human, bridges across the abyss of the unknown. Parsifal on the throne of Amfortas is Elgar

under the hat of Cardinal Bourne, Walford Davies in Archbishop Davidson's seat, the poets and painters and singers of all ages taking the place of the popes and priests and dissenting ministers. No wonder the ecclesiastics have little love for those artists who are unwilling to narrow the light of their inmost life with the blinkers of dogma. It must be very unpleasant to be invested with the dignity of a god's messenger and then find one's message to be stale or spurious, the god meanwhile revealing himself by another creature. That is the pathos of the priestly position and the secret of its inveterate antagonism to any artist's work which does not conform to the limits of some creed. And, to make the fact clearer from the opposite point of view, is it not obvious that those priests who are most alive in the world of thought and humanity are a small body of men intent on surrounding the barren forms allowed to them with elements of beauty, dramatic ritual, banners, costumes, lights and music? And are not those the prerogatives of men like Wagner? For only such men use them out of the inspiration of their hearts and the need of a living world.

So it happens that *Parsifal* is one of the most recent chapters of those inspired scriptures which shoot shafts of light from the strange unformed desires of men's souls into the dark wilderness of their minds. Out of our souls the heavens and hells have sprung, and in our minds and bodies they are fertilised and grow to reality. Some day, of course, when the fools of this world have learned to mutter as through a gramophone darkly what Wagner has set in the open for all to hear who have ears,—some day *Parsifal* will be added to the authorised version of the scriptures. Then the work will cease to be of great spiritual value; then the editors and divines

may issue their revised and bowdlerised versions as they please. Perhaps that day is not so far distant as one may think. Already the advance guard of æsthetes propose "to modify the tedium of Wagner by judicious excision." Would that they might think fit to modify the tedium of their own life and thought in a like judicious manner! However, we have scarcely reached the point when the revising misinterpreting fraternity—musical or clerical—are likely to meddle to any purpose. The work itself is not yet sufficiently understood by them. And they will not believe my interpretation. They whom the gods hate they first make stupid. The powers of state churches, royal operas, and other such may have felt one or two of the dangers of *Parsifal*, but they have not yet read in it their own wholesale condemnation. They have taught themselves to believe that art is a narcotic and their own faith has lulled them to sleep. They are startled by the rude defiance of the revolutionary politician; but they do not know that there is more real revolution in great art works than in all the anticlerical diatribes of Huxley or all the antimonarchical bombs of the nihilist. And the nearer an art-work approaches the spirit of the dance, the more essentially revolutionary it is likely to be.

Wagner himself recognised the origin of drama in forms of the dance; but because of the vacuity of the operatic ballet he practically abjured obvious dance forms until this last period of his development. The Venusburg music in *Tannhäuser* is an exception, but there the dance is used in a puritanical spirit to deride the evil of its entirely sensual application. In *Parsifal* also that attitude might be found, were it not for the solemn Dance of the Knights of the Grail. In *Tannhäuser* the women of Venus's Mountain are opposed in feeling to the all-too-miserable pilgrims; and the



odium of the antithesis reflects Wagner's attitude to the dance itself. But in *Parsifal* the solemn ones dance as well. The scenery itself dances! This is the birth of a new soul in music-drama (or, rather, the re-birth of a very ancient soul),—the soul of Greek drama, wherein the personal issues of the characters are merged in the vast mystic issues of that choral dance which arose in the ritual of natural religion.

The modern craze for dancing of all kinds—Isidora Duncan, Maud Allan, Pavlova, Margaret Morris, Mordkin, Nijinsky—and all the glories of the Russian Ballet, the folk dancing of Mary Neal and Cecil Sharp, the tortuous passions of the strange dance rhythms which reach us through the riot of races in America,—these things have taken us by storm, not merely by way of passing fashionable craze, but rather because we English people feel that we have too long penned up our souls in the ice of business and “good form.”

Out of an age of frost and materialism we are emerging. The idealism of business has passed to America and Germany, where men are now living for those thoughts and fantasies which possessed Spain and England centuries ago. The gods of trade and world-adventure fail to satisfy our hunger. We are trade-weary, and can only save ourselves from extinction as a people by an awakening of those spiritual energies which for so many years have remained uncared for. Those energies may find means of expression in all forms of art, but in no forms so readily as in music and the dance. For music is the most mysterious, and physical movement the most convincing of all the arts. Unite these two, and we travel the whole way from the crude unformed desire of the soul to its complete revelation in so far as it concerns the outer world. Even as the vague aspirations of spirit-

ual life do really need to be balanced by the weight of the world, the flesh, and the devil; so no one can doubt that the latest developments of music, and the atmospheric unsubstantiality of it, need to be vindicated in the symbolism of the dramatic dance. These two are complementary. Without the drama music is vague in all that concerns human life; without music the drama can scarcely hint at the forces which reveal the divine life. The religious dance-dramas of the Greeks were not a mere national or local idiosyncrasy, but just the finest examples thus far of that instinctive æsthetic feeling which arises whenever man feels the joy and pain of the inner life. How instinctive the feeling is may best be expressed in the words of the savage who, being informed of a religious thought foreign to his nature, replied, "I do not dance that dance."

Those who have enjoyed the austere, remote conceptions of Gordon Craig cannot help feeling that he too is seeking an art of the theatre which shall be a divine service; and when we complain that his explanations are vague and his methods impossible, we need to remember that his conceptions are mighty and godlike, whereas the thing he is striving to replace is in the last throes of sensual senility. As Flaxman said of his older brother Blake, so Granville Barker has said of Craig that he is "splendid to steal from;" and it is safe to affirm that every vital deed in the theatre of to-day is an echo of the clash which results from Craig's hatred of Wagnerian realism.

We need not deal with that again now: but we ought to remember that the external conditions demanded by Craig become possible just because of the mystic drama suggested by the music of Wagner. In the sacramental scenes and the seduction scenes of *Parsifal* there is an inner drama more beautiful and

true than anything since the age of Pericles; but as hitherto staged the sacrament becomes sacrilege and the seduction mere silliness. But for that inner drama Craig has introduced the right conditions. No description of mine could reveal a fraction of the religious fitness which permeates the mysterious twilight of Craig's ideas. All I can do is to call attention to the fact that nearly all his finest work is planned in shadow: the light of day is too definite for religious thought. Craig builds his scenes as his architectural predecessors built the cathedrals, with a sense of the values of darkness. Even as we put out the light to enjoy a magic-lantern, so is it necessary to put out the light if we would catch some rays of the magic-glow which radiates from the soul and casts an occasional picture of flame through the heavy curtain of carnal life.

One of the chief conditions, then, of religious drama is that it shall be a shadow-drama. Not the comic silhouette play, nor the mute mockery of the cinematograph; but a serious, tender, ironic gods' play; a play of those powers which live beyond the light of the sun; a play of those immortal divine ones who move in the hearts of mortal men and women; a play of Zeus, Prometheus and Aphrodite; Jahveh, Shekinah and Baal; Wotan, Loge and Brünhilde; Midir, Eochaidh and Etain; Arthur, Elaine and Galahad. And because these great secret powers which live in us all can be but little known—a few hints of them slipping through some rhythm of movement or fragment of melody—we must not pretend or presume to place them in the bold light of full dramatic acquaintanceship. They must be Great Secrets, even while their figures are before us. So we may avoid the dilemma of the Wagnerian stage manager, who must either worry or depress his audience with unend-

ing gloom or shorten the shadows of his puppets to human proportions in a merciless and tawdry glare.

But there is another light than that of the lime. It is possible, with the help of music, to preserve the secrecy of the gods and yet to reveal some of their secrets; to leave them in their home of shadow and yet show their works in the sunshine. The folk-dancers manage it in the light of day on the village green. The dim lighting of the stage is helpful at times; but what matters is the inner light of imagination in the minds of the audience. Although outer blindness tends to inner vision, no one would want to establish a Hospital for the Seeing, or a theatrical tradition of darkness every bit as bad in its way as the curiosity-shop effects in fashionable West-end theatres. Obscurity is the most obvious condition for a mystic-drama; but there are others.

Wagner, in his greatest moments, has shown us how music may become at times the head and heart of the drama. By a device more effectual even than the deepest night, he has occasionally set our imaginations on the keenest edge of alertness. At the climax of *The Flying Dutchman*, where the souls of Senta and the Dutchman rise from the waters, in the Venusberg music of *Tannhäuser*, the Song in which Elsa foretells the wooing of Lohengrin, in that wonderful funeral music which follows the death of Siegfried, in the last scene of *The Dusk of the Gods*, and in the Grail and Flower-maiden scenes, the music contains the essence of the drama with a concentrated allusiveness combined with a free range for the individual hearer possible in no other form of art; but in most of these scenes, what Wagner causes us to see is so absolutely unworthy of the wonderful things he causes us to hear; and it seems scarcely possible to believe that the brain which heard the fight between



Sense and Sensuality in *Tannhäuser* could have allowed the eyes to be outraged by fat Venuses in halos of limelight, or allowed that mighty terror of divine doom at the end of *The Ring* to be accompanied by Brünhilde's ride on a roundabout horse and the falling of a timber yard. However, he did see beyond that at times. When Siegfried has fallen with the spear in his back and Hagen proudly stalks away over the rocks, the chief issue of the drama is concentrated in some of the noblest music Wagner ever wrote; and the darkness of the stage does not contradict to our eyes what our ears hear and our minds imagine. We know the terrible wrath of that broken rhythm, the pathos of the Volsung music; the grief of a race born to nobility and sorrow reveal a greater drama than ever was written in verse or set upon stage.

In the procession of Grail Knights in the first act of *Parsifal*, there is a promise of that new drama which Gordon Craig is bringing about: that new drama which is as old as the knowledge of the gods. In the far spanning arches of the Grail castle, in a light that fades in the background and is yet strong enough for the imagination to be bound by the figures who enter, Wagner did achieve one visible beauty equal to the hundreds that he heard. And how did he do it? Surely by setting Amfortas and Parsifal in the background of musical importance and making the choral dance of the knights and the ceremonial feast the main object of vision. But we know that they are not the drama, although they occupy the greater part of the time. Amfortas is of vital importance, yet he says less than the chorus. Parsifal is the centre of the whole drama, yet he makes but one movement and says no word until the sacred dance is over and gone. And so, although nothing of the

stage play has been hidden, the imagination of the audience is stimulated in the rhythm of the dance and left free to roam its mystic way, knowing that the real drama of Amfortas and Parsifal can never be shown in stage-act, because it moves for ever in each separate soul of us all.

The most vital drama is that which takes place in the secret hearts of us all—the strife which is not completely known even to our nearest and dearest—the strife between us and destiny. So also the most vital form of dramatic art will be that which touches those notes of secret sympathy, and assures us that the souls of the artists, and onlookers, and hearers also take part in the struggle,—our defeats at the hands of the gods and our triumphs over them.