

**A PILGRIMAGE TO
BEETHOVEN:
NOVEL**

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A Pilgrimage to Beethoven: Novel by Richard Wagner

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RICHARD WAGNER

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A NOVEL

BY

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PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

RICHARD WAGNER, the famous musical composer, experienced perhaps the hardest time of his life in Paris. He left Riga, where he had been engaged as leader at a theatre in the year 1839, and taking passage on board a sailing vessel reached Boulogne-sur-mer after an adventurous sea-voyage, which suggested to him the idea of composing "The Flying Dutchman."

In Boulogne-sur-mer Wagner met Meyerbeer, who promised to do all he could for him in Paris.

Without any other recommendation than that of Meyerbeer, Wagner entered Paris, with little money but great expectations. On the strength of Meyerbeer's recommendation the director of the Theatre de la Renaissance promised to put on the stage one of Wagner's compositions, which was being translated by M. Dumesan. But before the translation was completed the Theatre de la Renaissance was bankrupt, and Richard Wagner was that much poorer in his hopes.

There were a number of famous musicians in Paris—Habeneck, Halévy, and others—but none of them attracted Wagner, who had no sympathy for artists whose sole object was to be counted among the lions of musical composition, and then to write operas for the purpose of making as much money as possible. He thought most of Berlioz, in spite of his repulsive character, because he at least did not compose for the sake of money; but Wagner never sought the friendship of Berlioz, of whom he said that "he lacked the genuine sense of art."

Finding no sympathetic friends among musicians, Wagner frequented the circles of authors, painters, and scholars. And his disgust with the lack of idealism in the musical world of Paris, together with his straitened circumstances, which sometimes bordered on actual destitution, made his sojourn in Paris very gloomy; but his sorry experience only served to purify his love for music, and the mere sight of the public which took delight in the frivolous melodies of the Italian operas made him think more seriously about the high purpose of genuine music. He became more and more conscious of his ideals, and when requested by M. Schlesinger to write for the *Gazette Musicale* he wrote several articles, among which the most beautiful is his novelette, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*.

The success of this first literary attempt of Wagner induced him to write several other articles on German music, including "The Virtuosi and the Artists," "The Artist and the Public," being a talk on music in the form of a dialogue, "A Happy Evening," and "Rossini's *Stabat Mater*." Another sketch, entitled *An End in Paris*, which was intended to be a continuation of his novelette, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, is written in a profoundly melancholy mood, and seems to convey the lesson of Schopenhauer's pessimism that a genius is not fit to live in this miserable world, but must die of starvation.

In the first volume of his collected works Wagner published all the literary essays on music written at that time, as the *Posthumous Papers* of the hero of his first novelette. In none of the essays, however, did Wagner reach the same height of poetic inspiration as in his *Pilgrimage to Beethoven*. Most of them are fair articles on musical subjects; the one which discusses Rossini's *Stabat Mater* is a vigorous and well-written, although decidedly unjust, accusation of a rival. They all may claim to be above mediocrity and all are worth reading; but the main interest we can take in them consists in the fact that they were written by a great composer.

The sketch, "A Happy Evening," contains several beautiful passages on music which are worth quoting. Wagner criticises those musical critics who confound the languages of music and of poetry, trying, for instance, to interpret Beethoven's "Symphony in A sharp" as a peasant marriage. "Music," Wagner says, "expresses that which is eternal, infinite, and ideal. Music does not express the passion, the love, the yearning of this or that individual, in this or that situation. It expresses passion, love, and yearning themselves, and, indeed, in an infinitely manifold variety of motives, whose exclusive peculiarity is conditioned in the nature of music, and is foreign and inexpressible in any other kind of speech." (*Ges. Werke*, Vol. I. p. 183.)

The form in which this essay, "A Happy Evening," is dressed, is that of a dialogue between two enthusiastic musicians, in which one of them says: "Blessed be the God who created the spring and music." (*Ibid.*, p. 173.) Wagner makes one of them sum up the gist of their conversation in these words, which are the conclusion of that "happy evening": "Long live good fortune; long live joy; long live the courage that animates us in the struggle with our fate; long live the victory which a nobler consciousness gains over the infamy of all that is vulgar; long live that love which requites our courage; long live friendship which supports our faith; long live hope, the ally of our presages; long live the day; long live the night; a greeting to the sun; a greeting to the stars; thrice greeted be Music and her high-priests! Eternally adored and worshipped be God, the God of joy and of happiness, the God who created music. Amen!"

With all such passages, which are beautiful in themselves, these various essays can only be forced into a unity with Wagner's novelette, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, and this is true most of all of the continuation of the novelette, *An End in Paris*. This latter is even jarring. While the little tale, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, reaches the highest pitch of noble enthusiasm for music, in which all the misery of this world appears transfigured, its continuation,

An End in Paris, is so full of discord that all beauty of the idealism of art is drowned in the sufferings that precede the terrible act of suicide. The two sketches have been written in two different moods, and they do not belong together. We can understand how Richard Wagner, oppressed with cares and sorrows, came to write the tragic tale, *An End in Paris*, but we cannot approve of spoiling the first novel, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, by attaching to it the ghastly story of an unsuccessful genius, who, by overestimating his own talents, lives in a fool's paradise and becomes at last, when starvation stares him in the face, a prey to despair.

A most beautiful passage, in this otherwise terrible story, is unquestionably the dying musician's confession of faith which he expresses in his last will as follows :

' I believe in God, Mozart, and Beethoven, and also in their "disciples and apostles. I believe in the Holy Ghost and in the "truth of the invisible Art. I believe that Art proceeds from God "and lives in the hearts of all enlightened men. I believe that who- "ever has once revelled in the lofty enjoyments of this high Art "will be her devotee forever and can never deny her. I believe "that all can become blessed through Art, and that, therefore, "everybody should be permitted to die of starvation for her sake. "I believe that I shall be highly beatified through death; I believe "that I was a discord on earth which through death shall be glo- "riously resolved in purity. I believe in a last judgment which will "condemn terribly all those who have dared to practise usury in this "world with that high and chaste Art, those who prostituted and "dishonored her through the depravity of their hearts and vile "greed for sensuality! I believe that all such evil doers will be "condemned to listen to their own music for all eternity. Yet I "believe that the faithful disciples of this high Art will be trans- "figured, clad in heavenly garments of sunny and scented melo- "dies, and will be united with the divine source of all harmony "forever and aye. May a merciful lot fall to me! Amen."

Having extracted from Wagner's essays those passages which

we deem beautiful and most expressive, we abstain from translating and publishing the story, *An End in Paris*, because we are convinced that the beauty of the novelette, *A Pilgrimage to Beethoven*, can only be spoiled by receiving a false and inappropriate setting. In letting the novelette stand by itself, as it was first conceived by Richard Wagner, we believe that we restore it to its original beauty. It is a most exquisite gem of the poetic imagination of a great composer, and deserves to be widely read and known all over the world. May this translation make it popular all over the English-speaking world and help the spread of a love of true Art and genuine Music.

PAUL CARUS,
Manager of the Open Court Publishing Co.