

## A GLIMPSE OF FRAU WAGNER.

How the dogs barked!

I ran to the window to see the cause of the uproar, for the day had been dull and stormy enough, and Swiss pensions are not conducive to raising one's spirits, and I welcomed any interruption with joy.

There were all three of our canine guardians, with their tails lifted like animated feather dusters in the air, their jaws stretched into hideous disproportion, and their twelve individual legs dancing an animated jig from one edge of the grass plot to the other. And the reason why was an overloaded luggage-van—but such luggage! verily a man's belongings are the keynote to his character!

A rocking-chair, leather covered, of superbly generous dimensions, boxes galore, rolls of music, stacks upon stacks of music books, boxes and bags, bags and boxes, and last, but not least, some wooden cases corded carefully, as though anticipating a set to with a dishonest Italian frontier, which, I was informed later, they assailed yearly.

"Whose?" I questioned sententiously.

"Frau Wagner's," was the solemn response, delivered in Swiss patois and reverence fairly bristling with exclamation points.

My disrespectful lips formed themselves into a round hole to let forth a whistle, but I pulled myself together and commented instead, "The great Frau Wagner?"

"You have said it."

"But——"

"There is no but. Here she comes!" And an antediluvian four-wheeler came rolling up the gravel drive-way, groaning and squeaking with the weight of its interior.

Slowly she descended—a tall, angular figure draped in a hideous loose sort of black coat, topped by a grey-haired head, surmounted by a broad straw round hat, edged with a flounce of black lace and a veil.

Two slim, girlish figures followed her with a hop, skip, and a jump, toned down discreetly as the angular figure turned, and a voice from the depths of it demanded musically in German—

"Everything here, Isolde?"

"Yes, Mutterchen."

"Gut!" And then she turned, and, followed closely by her daughters, climbed the stairs and disappeared. There was a sound of hurrying to and fro, some orders given quietly and answered noisily, a telephone sort of service which is not unamusing to observe at times, and then all was silence.

The next morning I met her coming down the stairs as I was going up. To my surprise she stopped, as though with an air of conferring a great honour upon me, unsolicited.

"I think," she said in a deep, essentially musical voice, "this is the person who is musical; have I been misinformed?"

I told her no, and was about to add something else, when she interrupted me serenely with—

"Will you be good enough to discontinue your music, or else limit it to hours when I am not in the house? I have been ordered here for complete rest, my nerves are all unstrung from frequent rehearsals, or rather the overlooking of rehearsals, at Bayreuth."

As she spoke I looked well at her—this woman who, the daughter of Liszt, the divorced wife of Von Bulow, and the widow of Richard Wagner, is considered by some the most intellectual woman in all Germany.

The eyes are grey and deep-set, benign and intensely humorous in expression by turns, the hair is grey and thin, parted and fastened neatly back in a coil behind. The nose, a hawk's beak, imperious, with dilating nostrils; the upper lip is long and carries out the humour of the eyes, the lower jaw is broad and strong, the whole face of an intensely Jewish cast. Her manner is essentially and thoroughly charming, her enunciation, does she speak in French, German, or English, remarkable for its musical purity. Her words are delivered distinctly and slowly and with extreme unction. She almost invariably repeats herself, as though not entirely convinced that one understands her. This is most irritating; but there is much in her, like in most strong characters, which is both aggressive and irritating. First, her pretentiousness; second, her autocratic ideas as to the world swinging on a Wagner pivot set to

Wagner music; third, her constantly displayed conviction that she is a great celebrity, and all the world must know it.

I complied with her request. I remembered those blessed hours which Wagner music had given me, and left out the cursed ones when it had been his fault that I was irretrievably bored, and I passed on. As I say, I swallowed it all submissively; but there was one feature of the Wagner régime I did not swallow, and that was the Wagner cur.

I knew him not wisely but too well as the weeks went by and the Wagner contingent still remained. He was an ill-mannered brute, and he and I fell out and never made it up from the day I trod on his tail expressly, albeit gently, to check in what I considered would be a judicious and final manner, his voluminous and incessant yowling.

When he started in—and he never left off, from early morning to late at night, to early morning again—the entire orchestra at Bayreuth would have been at their wits' ends to out-do him. There was a regard for the most refined details of his art which would have out-Wagnered the essence of all the Wagners of the past and present.

In appearance, he was, supposedly, a black poodle, a has-been as to beauty, a never-was as to lineage. I knew the species he was meant to represent well. One sees them every day on the Champs Elysées in Paris, befrilled as to ankles, beruffed as to throat, daintily shaved and groomed as my lady's thoroughbred, stepping gingerly from puddle to puddle as though striving to emulate the lifted-skirt example of his Frenchy little mistress.

But the Wagner poodle never had been introduced even to a French poodle, I am sure. His ancestors had been German poodles, and Bayreuth had spoiled his figure, accessible always to sausages and beer, and Wagner music had completed his chequered career. His eyes were unclean, his coat dirty and ragged and jaggedly cut, his tongue had a most depressing flop, and his knees were like those trousers of grandpapa's which have gone down to posterity in that familiar and thrilling ditty as "bulgy."

And how he sang o' nights! and through it slept the most intellectual woman in all Germany, the daughter of Liszt, the wife of Von Bulow, the widow of Richard Wagner. Truly, one man's meat is another man's poison.

Then there were the two daughters, Isolde and Eva—tall, ladylike, rather pretty young women, in miraculous German dresses, freshened up with Parisian additions, such as fichus and ribbons. They spoke several languages fluently, but invariably responded in the opposite one from that in which they were addressed, and they were the devoted slaves of their majestic mamma.

The great event of the day was when Frau Wagner went to walk. This was accomplished with a laboured pomposity which was bewildering to behold. The very leaves turned their best side foremost as the *cortège* passed, the waters of the lake turned its whisperings to discreet ripples instead of noisy rivulets of sound or swishes of fresh protest against shore and bushes, and the sun pretty generally shone his brightest.

It was a daily parade from the château pension to the lake, back to the château pension again, and, with the poodle to bring up the rear, it was a most edifying and instructive spectacle.

One day an intrepid English concert-singer was accorded an "audition" in the pension salon. "I was never so frightened in my life," she confided to me in a halting whisper.

"Why?" I asked. "Frau Wagner has never sung nor written a note of music in her life." But this was apparently considered no evidence of her lack of talent in regard to the laws of criticism, for the little English girl sat in silent terror of the approaching rustle of those majestic skirts whose owner was to damn her with faint praise. She was such a pretty little girl, with a fresh pink-and-white skin, and a glory of hair, and a sympathetic voice miraculously trained by Lamperti. She had won many a duet with it in London, and she was "getting on" famously until that day when the great and only Frau Wagner took the wind out of her sails for aye.

But hush! The door opens, and the tall, stately figure glides into our midst, accompanied by the two devoted, and what we had come to look upon as two inevitable, daughters.

Slowly she sails in among us as though we were miles from her, seats herself, casts an indifferent glance about, and then bows her head.