

The fiat has gone forth, the concert is about to begin. The song was a little light graceful thing of Grieg's, exquisitely dainty as to motive, and artistically sung, but at its close there was an awkward pause, then brilliant flashes of silence.

Then, from the depths of the sofa whereupon Frau Wagner was seated, "Not bad," said an evenly-modulated voice, in the tones of an oracle, and then, "The name of the composer?"

"Edouard Grieg," from the little cantatrice, whose cheeks were feverishly rosy and whose hands were clammy cold.

"How my heart beat!" she ejaculated to me, tragically, later; "never—no never, even at my first concert—has it beat so hard as that."

Then she sang again, and then again, and then again, to silence; then hopelessly she seated herself, and waited for the verdict from a woman who had never sung a note

"The music of to-day," began the merciless musical voice, "is universally bad. Such being the case, it might be wise for you, since that is the music you choose, to attach yourself to something which would be worth while. Endeavour to enunciate the words so clearly that one may lose sight of the insufficiency of the composition."

"But Frau Wagner"—eagerly—"that last song was from *Samson and Dalila* of Saint-Saëns. You surely know Saint-Saëns, and recognise his genius. Why, *Samson and Dalila* is an acknowledged musical pearl by the whole world."

The quiet voice continued, as though unaware of the interruption. "The French music is all bad," it announced succinctly.

But here I spoke. The memory of France's generous acclamation over Wagner music was with me, and, after all, "turn-about is fair play."

"In spite of the fact that the French music is in many instances inferior to the German, let us admit that there is much French music which is very beautiful, and that France has very enthusiastically and generously welcomed Wagner's operas at last," I said.

There was no answer.

"What music," timidly suggested the singer, "would you advise me to sing?"

The answer came this time without a moment's pause.

"The music of Wagner; it is the music of the present, it will be the music of the future." And then she rose, and, bowing gravely, moved in her stately fashion away.

"Whew!" said an irreverent American boy, who had been looking in the window with his chin on his dingy hands, his eyes round with enjoyment of the scene. "Isn't she a *hummer*,

though! What is she putting on so many airs about, I should like to know?"

But his mother's hand was laid upon his lips, and his mother's voice whispered in his ear, "Be silent—she is the widow of the great Wagner."

"Verily," murmured another irrepressible, "the old Latin proverb is right—'Only those whom we do not know seem great.'"

"And yet," someone else remarked, "that woman holds the possibilities of the present translation of Wagner music in the hollow of her hand. She it is who chooses the singers at Bayreuth. It is she who trains the orchestra with tireless energy; she was the guiding genius of Richard Wagner; her father was Franz Liszt, her mother the Countess d'Agoult (George Stern), on whose account Franz Liszt became an abbé rather than legalise his union. Her sister is Madame Emile Ollivier, the wife of the great French statesman."

She had spoken: music was Wagner, Wagner was music.

"Be the pauwers," ejaculated a jovial, rollicking Irishman, who knew no more of music than he did "of the king of the cannibals, be Jove"—"be the pauwers, she must be a divil of a musician."

The widow of Richard Wagner, that is what the world knows of her; but to me she seemed a woman of another sphere for whom this world did not exist. Her heaven is Bayreuth, the accomplishment of Wagner's music the crown of her life.

At Bayreuth, the house she inhabits stands in a neglected garden, and there she lives and dreams of Wagner. All the year she directs those rehearsals, remaining in town and dining at the little restaurant near the theatre the days her closest attention to detail is required.

She is a woman of singular intensity of purpose, of great audacity, of very positive convictions. Now that Wagner is dead, and only his creations bring him back to her, she rules those creations even more firmly and wisely than did their great composer.

No doubt she considers herself but a translator of her husband's gigantic genius, since his name and his talent are ever on her lips; but from force of constant touch with his works she has assumed the affection of an adopted mother for another's offspring, and albeit the spectacle of such fidelity is interesting, there is, none the less, something almost comic, and often painfully pathetic, in her attitude of tragedy queen. She stands like a nineteenth-century Pandora, smiling benignly on the clamouring populace below, whom she fancies one and all are impatient for her to open her magic box of goodies.

Verily, "Only those whom we do not know seem great."

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