

THE TWO WAGNERS

One Worshipped for His Complexity, the Other for His Simplicity

(Written for The Saturday Journal.)

Richard Wagner, the famous composer, who tore the science of musical construction into shreds and made a bonfire with the fragments, succeeded in arousing the attention of the world and the consternation of usicians.

The great Richard built his musical scores upon the disorganization of and departure from the generally accepted science of harmony as applied to sound. He wrote the famous Wagnerian music in the face of theories which declared composition based upon such departures as his were creations of noise from a disordered musical sense. Yet these very departures and fanatical musical descriptions are what made Wagner famous. The one great sorrow of Wagner's life was that he could not produce enough noise. Musical instruments were incapable of producing the volume and the players too thick-headed to interpret his ideas.

Perceiving no one thoroughly understood his music he was compelled to play it himself, if he wanted it properly presented. He would hire an orchestra, drill and beat his interpretation into it until he had the orchestra able to play the score near enough so you could distinguish the music from previously produced scores. Then he would rehearse and rehearse and then rehearse some more. After one or two of the nightingales got an idea of what he was trying to bring out, he then closed in on them with the orchestra and drilled the 'we for a long time. Wagner discovered that paying a man or woman a salary didn't guarantee any certain degree of interpretation, so he was obliged to put on the performance with a discomforting realization that it was not going to be understandingly produced. He probably expected too much. It was impossible that his singers and orchestra understood what he understood, see what he saw, hear what he heard, feel what he felt and do as he would have done. Singers and orchestras are doing today with ease and gusto what he, the great Wagner, failed to do, and that was to per-

fectly produce his operas. In fashionable New York the people go at 7 in the evening and stay until 2 in the morning if they get the complete performance. Seats are auctioned off to the highest bidders and at big money. Wagner is doing more business than Shakespeare. By Richard Wagner the world was set on fire and is burning yet, and he it was who dared to overturn all generally accepted theories of sound in its relation to music. We may be compelled later on to use the torpedo, steam-engine and earthquake, punctuating with the bursting volcano, to describe his music, but Wagner we will have.

Noting the success of his namesake, a new Wagner has entered the field. With great insight our last Wagner has taken the opposite method of his distant relative in introducing himself. Richard got into prominence by complexing, mystifying, rendering unintelligible, twisting, distorting and warping out of all recognition all the musical laws he could find. To produce complexity was his sole object. To annihilate anything and everything which laid any claim to simplicity was his life work. But Charles Wagner, the new idealist, pursues the opposite course and is showing us a crying need for simplicity. He wants life simplified. Music being part of life, it is natural to suppose he wants that simplicity along with the rest of it. But who is going to do it, and how is it to be done, are great questions. Is Charles here to undo the works of Richard? It is a strange spectacle to see a second Wagner, but his mission is more strange and is attractive because he wants what Richard would not have, and that is simplicity. Charles Wagner has started a crusade along the line of simple living. Simple habits, simple eating, simple drinking, simple thinking, simple walks and simple everything go to make up the idea. He takes us all as we are and asks no questions. The idea is all right until he gets into the musical arena where Richard has been turned loose, and

then to try and do the "simple" Wagnerian complexion and roar is like knitting a pair of socks in a lion's den. Richard Wagner has done it—what will Charles Wagner do with it? He can blame his relative for much in life that isn't simple.

President Roosevelt, after looking at the present tariff and seeing the operations of the beef trust, fell an easy victim to the Wagnerian idea, and is in favor of the "simple life" as soon as Professor Wagner can get it on the market. A bad feature of the scheme for simplifying life is that no instructions go with the book. According to the manual it is our duty to get simple. We all know how to get saved, and how to get rich, but none of us out here in Oregon know how to get simple. As a nation we probably need to get simple in some respects, but as a rule we are now so overlasted simple that we can't hope to cram in much more. Simplicity in this country is so intimately connected with the life-complex that separation is not practicable. Complexity frequently encourages progress and advancement, and is not always bad in results. Complexity should be mastered, then it becomes simple. We should not throw away our problems for the reason they are not solved—hence still complex—but should solve the questions involved and thus render them simple.

The phonograph is a very complex and mysterious machine until it is understood and of all the great inventions on earth none are so simple as the wonderful phonograph. Where is the simple element we are to seek? Shall we turn from our complex affairs and retreat to the primitive wherein we have no conditions, or are we to attain the simple by understanding the complex? Once understood nothing remains complex. Therefore, why shall we rather return to simple language, simple thought, simple works and simple everything, if by earnest effort we can secure a greater degree of simplicity by mastering the said-to-be complex? We lower the standard by return to

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primitive. We raise it by simplifying the complex.

Mary Ann is simple. When she goes to college she returns Maritana Antoinetta. This is complex. But the life of Maritana Antoinetta is different from that of Mary Ann. This added state of complexity is had so Wagner says in his book, and she ought to be simplified, but not Maritana Antoinetta. Wagner would have to wait until Fido jumps down before he gets a hearing. But with Mary Ann the calico is good enough. The "old man" can get her a dress as easily as she. The trimmings, patterns and style are immaterial. Visitors to this house comment upon the simplicity to be found there not exactly as Mr. Wagner would like. But, after this simple, calico-dressed girl comes home from college with a new name, she at once infuses a life around home that isn't much on the simple order for the old folks. Maritana must have a piano, a chateleine and gloves. She must sleep late, read books and study the fashion plates. She has the hen moved away from her window. She wants new furniture in her room. She wants a carpet on the floor, a stove and a comb and brush. All these things are complex when comparing them as requisites to her boudoir full of calico wrappers. Here this girlish complex life is a great benefit. When she gets so complex that she can't live at home any more on account of the simplicity, then it is time to open up the Wagner battery. But so long as she takes it easy, it is a good thing for all the family. The men folks will quit going to bed with their neckties on and the kids will be made to take off their boots.

Simple living is a very hard thing to do. It is easy to get a wrong impression about what it means to be simple. Carelessness gets into some "simple" clothes and parades around the country and is thought to be the "simple life" at its perfection. In reality there is no distinction between a so-called complex life and a simple life. Under complex life we call a snake a head with a tail to it, while under simple life we say it a tail with a head on it. To be simple means to be yourself and you are that now. You can't get simple by trying to be someone else or assimilate a foreign nature.

No intention of criticizing Mr. Wagner enters these remarks, but rather the striking comparison it affords when we parallel the "simple life" of the present Charles Wagner with the monumental magnitude of the efforts of the late Richard Wagner towards complexity, and yet both the Wagners are blots of the people. This affords another peculiar state of affairs. We are the complexity of one Wagner and in the same breath idealizing the simplicity of the other Wagner. A rather remarkable position for the American public is this paradoxical worship of the greatest exponent of the complex in the same moment we idealize the great exponent of simplicity.

FRED R. WATERS.

Salem, January 18, 1905.

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