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LORD'S LECTURES

BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY.

BY JOHN LORD, LL.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE OLD ROMAN WORLD," "MODERN EUROPE," ETC., ETC.

VOLUME XIV.

THE NEW ERA.

A SUPPLEMENTARY VOLUME, BY RECENT WRITERS,
AS SET FORTH IN THE PREFACE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS.

PUBLISHERS' PREFACE.

In preparing the new edition of Dr. Lord's great work, it has been thought desirable to do what the venerable author's death in 1894 did not permit him to accomplish, and add a volume summarizing certain broad aspects of achievement in the last fifty years. It were manifestly impossible to cover in any single volume--except in the dry, cyclopaedic style of chronicling multitudinous facts, so different from the vivid, personal method of Dr. Lord--all the growths of the wonderful period just closed. The only practicable way has been to follow our author's principle of portraying *selected historic forces*,--to take, as representative or typical of the various departments, certain great characters whose services have signalized them as "Beacon Lights" along the path of progress, and to secure adequate portrayal of these by men known to be competent for interesting exposition of the several themes.

Thus the volume opens with a paper on "Richard Wagner: Modern Music," by Henry T. Finck, the musical critic of the *New York Evening Post*, and author of various works on music, travel, etc.; and then follow in order these: "John Ruskin: Modern Art," by G. Mercer Adam, author of "A Précis of English History," recently editor of the *Self-Culture Magazine* and of the Werner Supplements to the Encyclopaedia Britannica; "Herbert Spencer: The Evolutionary Philosophy," and "Charles Darwin: His Place in Modern Science," both by Mayo W. Hazeltine, literary editor of the *New York Sun*, whose book reviews over the signature "M.W.H." have for years made the *Sun's* book-page notable; "John Ericsson: Navies of War and Commerce," by Prof. W.F. Durand, of the School of Marine Engineering and the Mechanic Arts in Cornell University; "Li Hung Chang: The Far East," by Dr. William A. P. Martin, the distinguished missionary, diplomat, and author, recently president of the Imperial University, Peking, China; "David Livingstone: African Exploration," by Cyrus C. Adams, geographical and historical expert, and a member of the editorial staff of the *New York Sun*; "Sir Austen H. Layard: Modern Archaeology," by Rev. William Hayes Ward, D.D., editor of *The Independent*, New York, himself eminent in Oriental exploration and decipherment; "Michael Faraday: Electricity and Magnetism," by Prof. Edwin J. Houston of Philadelphia, an accepted authority in electrical engineering; and, "Rudolf Virchow: Modern Medicine and Surgery," by Dr. Frank P. Foster, physician, author, and editor of the *New York Medical Journal*.

The selection of themes must be arbitrary, amid the numberless lines of development

during the "New Era" of the Nineteenth Century, in which every mental, moral, and physical science and art has grown and diversified and fructified with a rapidity seen in no other five centuries. It is hoped, however, that the choice will be justified by the interest of the separate papers, and that their result will be such a view of the main features as to leave a distinct impression of the general life and advancement, especially of the last half of the century.

It is proper to say that the preparation and issuance of Dr. Lord's "Beacon Lights of History" were under the editorial care of Mr. John E. Howard of Messrs. Fords, Howard, and Hulbert, the original publishers of the work, while the proof-sheets also received the critical attention of Mr. Abram W. Stevens, one of the accomplished readers of the University Press in Cambridge, Mass. Mr. Howard has also supervised the new edition, including this final volume, which issues from the same choice typographical source.

NEW YORK, September, 1902.

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BEACON LIGHTS OF HISTORY.

RICHARD WAGNER: MODERN MUSIC.

BY HENRY T. FINCK.

If the Dresden schoolboys who attended the *Kreuzschule* in the years 1823-1827 could have been told that one of them was destined to be the greatest opera composer of all times, and to influence the musicians of all countries throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, they would, no doubt, have been very much surprised. Nor is it likely that they could have guessed which of them was the chosen one. For Richard Wagner--or Richard Geyer, as he was then called, after his stepfather--was by no means a youthful prodigy, like Mozart or Liszt. It is related that Beethoven shed tears of displeasure over his first music lessons; nevertheless, it was obvious from the beginning that he had a special gift for music. Richard Wagner, on the other hand, apparently had none. When he was eight years old his stepfather, shortly before his death, heard him play on the piano two pieces from one of Weber's operas, which made him wonder if Richard might "perhaps" have talent for music. His piano teacher did not believe even in that "perhaps," but told him bluntly he would "never amount to anything" as a musician.

For poetry, however, young Richard had a decided inclination in his school years; and this was significant, inasmuch as it afterwards became his cardinal maxim that in an opera "the play's the thing," and the music merely a means of intensifying the emotional expression. Before his time the music, or rather the singing of florid tunes, had been "the thing," and the libretto merely a peg to hang these tunes on. In this respect, therefore, the child was father to the man. At the age of eleven he received a prize for the best poem on the death of a schoolmate. At thirteen he translated the first twelve books of Homer's *Odyssey*. He studied English for the sole purpose of being able to read Shakspeare. Then he projected a stupendous tragedy, in the course of which he killed off forty-two persons, many of whom

had to be brought back as ghosts to enable him to finish the play.

This extravagance also characterized his first efforts as a composer, when he at last turned to music, at the age of sixteen. One of his first tasks, when he had barely mastered the rudiments of composition, was to write an overture which he intended to be more complicated than Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Heinrich Dorn, who recognized his talent amid all the bombast, conducted this piece at a concert. At the rehearsal the musicians were convulsed with laughter, and at the performance the audience was at first surprised and then disgusted at the persistence of the drum-player, who made himself heard loudly every fourth bar. Finally there was a general outburst of hilarity which taught the young man a needed lesson.

Undoubtedly the germs of his musical genius had been in Wagner's brain in his childhood,-for genius is not a thing that can be acquired. They had simply lain dormant, and it required a special influence to develop them. This influence was supplied by Weber and his operas. In 1815, two years after Wagner's birth, the King of Saxony founded a German opera in Dresden, where theretofore Italian opera had ruled alone. Weber was chosen as conductor, and thus it happened that Wagner's earliest and deepest impressions came from the composer of the "Freischütz." In his autobiographic sketch Wagner writes: "Nothing gave me so much pleasure as the 'Freischütz.' I often saw Weber pass by our house when he came from rehearsals. I always looked upon him with a holy awe." It was lucky for young Richard that his stepfather, Geyer, besides being a portrait-painter, an actor, and a playwright, was also one of Weber's tenors at the opera. This enabled the boy, in spite of the family's poverty, to hear many of the performances. In fact, Wagner, like Weber, owes a considerable part of his success as a writer for the stage to the fact that he belonged to a theatrical family, and thus gradually learned "how the wheels go round." Such practical experience is worth more than years of academic study.

While Wagner cordially acknowledged the fascination which Weber's music exerted on him in his boyhood, he was hardly fair to Weber in his later writings. In these he tries to prove that his own music-dramas are an outgrowth of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. When Beethoven wrote that work, Wagner argues, he had come to the conclusion that purely instrumental music had reached a point beyond which it could not go alone, wherefore he called in the aid of poetry (sung by soloists and chorus), and thus intimated that the art-work of the future was the musical drama,--a combination of poetry and music.

This is a purely fantastic notion on Wagner's part. There is no evidence that Beethoven had any such purpose; he merely called in the aid of the human voice to secure variety of sound and expression. Poetry and music had been combined centuries before Beethoven in the opera and in lyric song.

No, the roots of Wagner's music-dramas are not to be found in Beethoven, but in Weber. His "Freischütz" and "Euryanthe" are the prototypes of Wagner's operas. The "Freischütz" is the first masterwork, as Wagner's operas are the last, up to date, of the romantic school; and

it embodies admirably two of the principal characteristics of that school: one, a delight in the demoniac, the supernatural--what the Germans call *gruseln*; the other, the use of certain instruments, alone or in combination, for the sake of securing peculiar emotional effects. In both these respects Wagner followed in Weber's footsteps. With the exception of "Rienzi" and "Die Meistersinger," all of his operas, from the "Flying Dutchman" to "Parsifal," embody supernatural, mythical, romantic elements; and in the use of novel tone colors for special emotional effects he opened a new wonder-world of sound, to which Weber, however, had given him the key.

"Lohengrin," the last one of what are usually called Wagner's "operas," as distinguished from his "music-dramas" (comprising the last seven of his works), betrays very strongly the influence of Weber's other masterwork, "Euryanthe." This opera, indeed, may also be called the direct precursor of Wagner's music-dramas. It contains eight "leading motives," which recur thirty times in course of the opera; and the dramatic recitatives are sometimes quite in the "Wagnerian" manner. But the most remarkable thing is that Weber uses language which practically sums up Wagner's idea of the music-drama. "Euryanthe," he says, "is a purely dramatic work, which depends for its success solely on the co-operation of the united sister-arts, and is certain to lose its effect if deprived of their assistance."

When Wagner wrote his essay on "The Music of the Future" for the Parisians (1860) he remembered his obligations to the Dresden idol of his boyhood by calling attention to "the still very noticeable connection" of his early work, "Tannhäuser," with "the operas of my predecessors, among whom I name especially Weber," He might have mentioned others,--Gluck, for instance, who curbed the vanity of the singers, and taught them that they were not "the whole show;" Marschner, whose grewsome "Hans Heiling" Wagner had in mind when he wrote his "Flying Dutchman;" Auber, whose "Masaniello," with its dumb heroine, taught Wagner the importance and expressiveness of pantomimic music, of which there are such eloquent examples in all his operas. During his three and a half years' sojourn in Paris, just at the opening of his career as an opera composer (1839-1842), he learned many things regarding operatic scenery, machinery, processions, and details, which he subsequently turned to good account. Even Meyerbeer, the ruler of the musical world in Paris at that time, was not without influence on him, though he had cause to disapprove of him because of his submission to the demands of the fashionable taste of the day, which contrasted so strongly with Wagner's own courageous defiance of everything inconsistent with his ideals of art. The result to-day--Meyerbeer's fall and Wagner's triumph--shows that courage, like honesty, is, in the long run, the best policy, and, like virtue, its own reward.

It is important to bear in mind all these lessons that Wagner learned from his predecessors, as it helps to explain the enormous influence he exerted on his contemporaries. Wonderful as was the power and originality of his genius, even he could not have achieved such results had he not had truth on his side,--truth, as hinted at, in moments of inspiration, by many of his predecessors.

Wagner was most shamefully misrepresented by his enemies during his lifetime. A

thousand times they wrote unblushingly that he despised and abused the great masters, whereas in truth no one ever spoke of them more enthusiastically than he, or was more eager to learn of them, though, to be sure, he was honest and courageous enough also to call attention to their shortcomings. In all his autobiographic writings there is not a more luminous passage than the following, in which he relates his experiences as conductor at the Riga Opera in 1838, when he was at work on "Rienzi":--

"The peculiar gnawing melancholy which habitually overpowered me when I conducted one of our ordinary operas was interrupted by an inexpressible, enthusiastic delight, when, here and there, during the performance of nobler works, I became conscious of the incomparable effects that can be produced by musico-dramatic combinations on the stage,--effects of a depth, sincerity, and direct realistic vivacity, such as no other art can produce. I felt quite elated and ennobled during the time that I was rehearsing Méhul's enchanting 'Joseph' with my little opera company." "Such impressions," he continues, "like flashes of lightning" revealed to him "unsuspected possibilities." It was by utilizing these "possibilities" and hints, and at the same time avoiding the errors and blemishes of his predecessors, that his superlative genius was enabled to create such unapproachable masterworks as "Siegfried" and "Tristan and Isolde."

The way up to those peaks was, however, slow and toilsome. For years he groped in darkness, and light came but gradually. It has already been intimated that his genius was slow in developing. A brief review of his romantic career will bring out this and other interesting points.

At the time when Richard Wagner was born (May 22, 1813), Leipzig was in such a state of commotion on account of the war to liberate Germany from the Napoleonic yoke that the child's baptism was deferred several months. To his schooldays reference has been made already, and we may therefore pass on to the time when he tried to make his living as an operatic conductor. Although he was then only twenty-one years old, he showed remarkable aptitude for this kind of work from the beginning, and it was through no fault of his that misfortune overtook every opera company with which he had anything to do. The bankruptcy, in 1836, of the manager of the Magdeburg Opera, affected him most disastrously, for it came at the moment when he had arranged for the first performance of an opera he had written, entitled, "Das Liebesverbot," or "The Novice of Palermo," and which therefore was given only once. Many years later an attempt was made to revive this juvenile work at Munich, but the project was abandoned because, as the famous Wagnerian tenor, Heinrich Vogl, informed the writer of this article, "Its arias and other numbers were such ludicrous and undisguised imitations of Donizetti and other popular composers of that time that we all burst out laughing, and kept up the merriment throughout the rehearsal." This is of interest because it shows that Wagner, like that other great reformer, Gluck, began his career by writing fashionable operas in the Italian style. A still earlier opera of his, "The Fairies,"--the first one he completed,--was not produced till 1888, fifty-five years after it had been written, and five years after Wagner's death. This has been performed a number of times in Munich, but it is so weak and uninteresting in itself that it required a splendid stage setting, and the

"historic" curiosity of Wagner's admirers to make it palatable. It is significant that already in these early works, Wagner wrote his own librettos,--a policy which he pursued to the end.

Königsberg was the next city where the opera company with which he was connected, failed. This was the more embarrassing to him, as he had in the meantime been so unwise as to marry a pretty actress, Minna Planer, who was destined, for a quarter of a century, to faithfully share his experiences,--chiefly disappointments. The pittance he got as conductor of these small German opera companies did not pay his expenses, all the less as he was fond of luxurious living, and, like most artists, the world over, foolishly squandered his money when he happened to have any.

At Riga, where Wagner next attempted to establish himself, the opera company again got into trouble, and his financial straits became such that, relying on his future ability to meet his obligations, he resolved to leave that part of the world altogether and seek his fortune in Paris. He knew that the Prussian Meyerbeer had won fame and fortune there,--why should not he have the same good luck? He had unbounded confidence in his own ability, and what increased his hopes of a Parisian success, was that he had already completed two acts of a grand historic opera, "Rienzi," based on Bulwer's novel, and written in the sensational and spectacular style of Meyerbeer. He supposed that all he had to do was to go to Paris, finish this opera, get it accepted through the influence of his countryman and colleague, Meyerbeer, and--wake up some morning famous and wealthy. He was not the first man who built castles in Spain.

To-day a trip from Riga to Paris is a very simple affair. You get into a train, and in about twenty-four hours are at your goal. In 1839 there were no such conveniences. Wagner had to go to the Prussian seaport of Pillau, and there board a sailing vessel which took him to London in three weeks and a half. His journey, however, was a much more romantic affair than a railway trip would have been. In the first place, it was a real flight--from his creditors whom he had to evade. Next he had to dodge the Russian sentries, whose boxes were placed on the boundary line only a thousand yards apart. A friend discovered a way of accomplishing this feat, and Wagner presently found himself on the ship, with his wife and his enormous Newfoundland dog. In his trunk he had what he hoped would help him to begin a brilliant career in Paris: one opera completed,--"The Novice of Palermo;" two acts of another,--"Rienzi;" and in his head he had the plot and some of the musical themes for a third,--"The Flying Dutchman."

The sea voyage came just in time to give him local color for this weird nautical opera. Three times the vessel was tossed by violent storms, and once the captain was obliged to seek safety in a Norwegian harbor. The sailors told Wagner their version of the "Flying Dutchman" legend, and altogether these adventures were the very thing he wanted at the time, and aided him in making his opera realistic, both in its text and its music, which imitates the howling of the storm winds and "smells of the salt breezes."

So for once our young musician had a streak of luck. But it did not last long. He found

Paris a very large city, and with very little use for him. He made the most diverse efforts to support himself, nearly always without success. Once it seemed as if his hopes were to be fulfilled. The Théâtre de la Renaissance accepted his "Novice of Palermo;" but at the last moment there was the usual bankruptcy of the management,--the fourth that affected him! Then he wrote a Parisian Vaudeville, but it had to be given up because the actors declared it could not be executed. The Grand Opera, on which he had fixed his eye, was absolutely out of the question. He was brought to such straits that he offered to sing in the chorus of a small Boulevard theatre, but was rejected. His wife pawned her jewels; on several occasions it is said that she even went into the street to beg a few pennies for their supper. It was doubtless during these years of starvation that Wagner acquired those gastric troubles which in later years often prevented him from working more than an hour or two a day.

A few German friends occasionally gave a little pecuniary aid, but the only regular source of income was musical hackwork for the publisher Schlesinger, who gladly availed himself of Wagner's skill in having him make vocal scores of operas, or arrange popular melodies for the piano and other instruments. Wagner also wrote stories and essays for musical periodicals, for which he received fair remuneration; but his attempt to compose romances and become a parlor favorite failed. Nobody wanted his songs, and he finally offered them to the editor of a periodical in Germany for two dollars and a half to four dollars apiece. This may seem ludicrously pathetic; but then had not poor Schubert, a little more than a decade before this, sold much better songs for twenty cents each!

Meyerbeer no doubt aided Wagner, but considering his very great influence in Paris, he achieved surprisingly little for him. The score of "Rienzi" had been completed in 1840, and in the spring of the next year, Wagner went to Meudon, near Paris, and there composed the music of "The Flying Dutchman," in seven weeks, but neither of these operas seemed to have the least chance to appear on the boards of the Grand Opera. The best their author could do was to sell the libretto of "The Flying Dutchman" for one hundred dollars, reserving the right to set it to music himself.

The outcome of all these disappointments was that he finally lost hope so far as Paris was concerned, and sent his "Rienzi" to Dresden and his "Flying Dutchman" to Berlin. The "Novice of Palermo" he had given up entirely after the bankruptcy of the Renaissance Théâtre, because, as he wrote, "I felt that I could no longer respect myself as its composer." Meyerbeer had, at his request, kindly sent a note to the intendant of the Dresden Opera, in which he said, among other things, that he had found the selections from "Rienzi," which Wagner had played for him, "highly imaginative and of great dramatic effect." Tichatschek, the famous Dresden tenor, examined the score, and liked the title role; the chorus director, Fischer, also pleaded for the acceptance of the opera; and so at last Wagner got word in Paris that it would be produced in Dresden. As Berlin, too, retained the manuscript of his other opera, there was reason enough for him to end his Parisian sojourn and return to his native country. He went overland this time, and, to cite his own words, "For the first time I saw the Rhine; with tears in my eyes I, the poor artist, swore eternal allegiance to my German fatherland."

It was fortunate in every way that he went to Dresden. His opera required many alterations and improvements, which he alone could make. He was permitted to superintend the rehearsals, which was, of course, a great advantage to the opera. The singers grew more and more enthusiastic over the music, and when the first public performance was given, on October 20, 1842, the audience also was delighted and remained to the very end, although the performance lasted six hours. The composer immediately applied the pruning-knife and reduced the duration to four hours and a half (from 6 to 10.30,--opera hours were early in those days); but the tenor, Tichatschek, declared with tears in his eyes, "I shall not permit any cuts in my part! It is too heavenly."

Those were proud and happy days for Wagner. "I, who had hitherto been lonely, deserted, homeless," he wrote, "suddenly found myself loved, admired, by many even regarded with wonderment." "Rienzi" was repeated a number of times to overcrowded houses, though the prices had been put up. It was regarded as "a fabulous success," and the management was eager to follow it up with another. So the score of "The Flying Dutchman" was demanded of Berlin (where they seemed in no hurry to use it), and at once put into rehearsal. It was produced in Dresden on January 2, 1843, only about ten weeks after "Rienzi,"--an almost unprecedented event in the life of an opera composer. Wagner conducted the second opera himself (also "Rienzi," after the first few performances), and gave so much satisfaction that he was shortly afterwards appointed to the position of royal conductor (which he held about six years).

So far, all seemed well. But disappointments soon began to overshadow his seeming good luck. The first production of the "Flying Dutchman" can hardly be called a success. Wagner himself characterized the performance as being, in its main features, "a complete failure," and the stage setting "incredibly awkward and wooden" (very different from what it is in Dresden to-day). Mme. Schroeder-Devrient was an admirable "Senta," and received enthusiastic applause; but the opera itself puzzled the audience rather than pleased it.

The music-lovers of Dresden had expected another opera *à la* Meyerbeer, like "Rienzi," with its arias and duos, its din and its dances, its pomps and processions, its scenic and musical splendors. Instead of that, they heard a work utterly unlike any opera ever before written; an opera without arias, duets, and dances, without any of the glitter that had theretofore entertained the public; an opera that simply related a legend in one breath, as it were,--like a dramatic ballad; an opera that indulged in weird chromatic scales, and harsh but expressive harmonies, with an unprecedented license. Here was the real Wagner, but even in this early and comparatively crude and simple phase, Wagner was too novel and revolutionary to be appreciated by his contemporaries; hence it is not to be wondered at that the "Flying Dutchman," after four performances in Dresden, and a few in Cassel and Berlin, disappeared from the stage for ten years.

Although Wagner was now royal conductor, he did not succeed in securing a revival of this opera at Dresden. His next work, "Tannhäuser," was nevertheless promptly accepted. The score was completed on April 13, 1845, and six, months later (October 19), the first

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