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Title: Opera Stories from Wagner

Author: Florence Akin

Release Date: July 24, 2004 [EBook #9456]

Language: English

Character set encoding: ASCII

*** START OF THIS PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK OPERA STORIES FROM
WAGNER ***

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OPERA STORIES FROM WAGNER

BY

FLORENCE AKIN

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

1915

[Illustration: SIEGFRIED]

NOTE: The verses printed in this book are quoted from Dr. Oliver

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From drawings by E. Pollak-Ottendorff

TO THE GIRLS AND BOYS

In these stories you will find some wonderful giants.

You will find beautiful maidens who lived in a river.

You will find a large family of little black dwarfs who lived under the river, and you will find a splendid hero.

The little children of Germany used to curl up in their mothers' arms, when bedtime came, and listen to the stories of these strange people.

When these little children grew up, they told the same stories to their children.

So it went for many, many years.

The stories have been put together by a man named Richard Wagner. He put them together in such a way that they make one long and wonderful story.

After he had told these stories in words, he told them again in a more beautiful way. He told them in music.

Sometime you will hear this music, and you will think of beautiful water-maidens, singing and dancing in the sunshine.

You will think of great giants walking over mountains.

You will think of the little black dwarfs under the river, and you will hear them hammering, hammering upon their anvils.

OPERA STORIES FROM WAGNER

THE RHINE-GOLD

THE HAPPY RHINE-DAUGHTERS

In the Rhine River there lived three beautiful maidens. They were called the Rhine-daughters.

They had long, golden hair, which floated upon the waves as they swam from rock to rock.

When their father went away, he left in their care a great lump of pure gold.

This gold was on the very top of the highest rock in the river.

Every morning the beautiful Rhine-daughters would dance and sing about their gold.

They sang a happy song:--

"Heigh-ho! hither, ye waters!
Waver and waft me to sleep on your breast!
Heigh-ho! hither, ye waters!
Weave me sweet dreams on your billowy crest!"

ALBERICH

One morning, when the sun was shining very brightly, the Rhine-daughters were startled by a strange sound in the depths of the water.

"Look!" whispered one. "What is that scowling at us from the rocks below?"

There, stealing along the river-bed, they saw a hideous little black dwarf.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" asked the Rhine-daughters.

"I am Alberich," answered the dwarf as he tried to climb up on the slippery rocks. "I came from the kingdom of the Nibelungs, down under the earth."

"What!" said the Rhine-daughters. "Surely you do not live down in the dark earth where there is no sunshine?"

"Yes," answered Alberich. "But I have come up to frolic in the sunshine with you"; and he held out his ugly, misshapen little hands to take the hands of the Rhine-daughters.

They only laughed at him and darted away to a higher rock.

Alberich hurried after them.

He blinked and scowled in the sunshine, because his eyes were not used to the light.

The maidens laughed and shouted in their play.

They called to Alberich and teased him.

They went very close to him, pretending that they would take his hand, that he, too, might play in the sunshine. Then they would quickly dart away, mocking him, and laughing at him more loudly than ever.

Alberich grew fierce and angry.

He clenched his fists and cried:--

"Woe be to you if I should catch you now."

THE CARELESS RHINE-DAUGHTERS

Alberich was the most hideous of all the black, ugly little Nibelungs.

The Nibelungs had cross, scowling faces, because they were always scolding each other.

They quarreled from morning till night, so, of course, their faces grew to look quarrelsome and ugly.

As Alberich hurried after the Rhine-daughters, he suddenly caught sight of the gold glittering in the morning sun.

He stood still. Then he straightened up as tall as his crooked, misshapen little back would let him. He opened his eyes wide.

"Oh! Sisters! See how Alberich is staring at our gold!" whispered one of the Rhine-daughters. "Perhaps this is the foe of which our father warned us. How careless we have been!"

"Nonsense," answered one. "Who would fear this little black fellow? He will do us no harm. Let him gaze upon the gold. Come, let us sing!"

[Illustration: THE RHINE-MAIDENS AND ALBERICH]

The maidens joined hands and circled about the gold, singing:--

"Hail to thee! Hail to thee!
Treasure most bright!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Beautiful sight!"

"Hail to thee! Hail to thee!
Out of the night!
Rhine-gold! Rhine-gold!
Wakened so bright!"

THE THEFT

Still Alberich stood and stared at the gold.

"What is it?" he gasped. "What is it?"

The Rhine-daughters shouted back to him:--

"Heigh-ho! and heigh-ho!
Dear little imp of woe,
Laugh with us, laugh with us!
Heigh-ho and heigh-ho!"

But Alberich did not laugh with them.

He would not take his eyes off the gold.

"That," said the maidens, "is our Rhine-gold."

"A very pretty plaything it is," said Alberich.

"Yes," replied the careless sisters, "it is magic gold. Who moulds this gold into a ring shall have all power upon the earth, save love."

Alberich muttered to himself: "What do I care for love if I have all the gold I want?"

Then he sprang upon the slippery rock and snatched the gold. With one wild leap he plunged into the depths below.

Down, down he went to his deep, dark kingdom, clutching fast the precious gold and muttering:--

"Now all the earth is mine. It is mine, all mine. Now I shall rule the world."

Poor foolish Alberich! He did not know that the best things in this world are the things which gold cannot buy.

The power of love is greater than the power of gold.

The maidens shrieked and screamed: "Our gold! Our gold! Our precious gold!"

Too late! Far, far below, they heard a laugh, the rough, rude laugh of Alberich, the dwarf.

THE SAD RHINE-DAUGHTERS

After that, when the Rhine-daughters came to the rock where the gold had been, they could not sing their happy song.

Their faces were very sad now, and they said: "Oh, why did Alberich steal our beautiful gold? It cannot make him happy, for no one can ever be truly happy who does not know love."

They often sat upon the rocks in the dusk of the evening and cried as if their hearts would break because they had lost their gold.

"The black waves surge in sorrow through the depths, And all the Rhine is wailing in its woe."

A CASTLE ON THE RHINE

On a mountain-side, above the banks of the Rhine, lived a family of splendid giants.

The greatest of the giants was Wotan. He was the king.

They had always lived out of doors, because the king had never been able to find a giant who was large enough to build such a grand castle as he wanted for his family.

But one day there came to the mountainside the largest giant Wotan had ever seen.

His name was Fafner.

He was many times larger than Wotan.

Wotan told Fafner how much he wanted a wonderful castle.

Fafner said: "I will build such a castle for you if you will give me your sister, Freya."

Fafner wanted to take the beautiful Freya to his own country.

Wotan did not stop to think what an awful thing it would be to lose Freya.

His thoughts were of nothing but the wonderful castle.

"Build it, Fafner," said Wotan.

That night Wotan and his family lay down upon their mountain to sleep.

Wotan dreamed of a wonderful stone castle with glittering towers.

He dreamed he saw the castle gleaming in the morning sun.

[Illustration: WOTAN]

THE MORNING

It was morning in the beautiful country where the Rhine River flows.

The giants upon the hillside were just awakening from their night's sleep.

During the night Fafner had built the wonderful castle.

Wotan's wife was the first to see it.

"Awake, Wotan! Awake!" she cried.

As Wotan opened his eyes he saw the castle upon the summit of the mountain.

What a great shining castle it was!

In delight Wotan cried: "T is finished! And my glorious dream is true!"

All night long Fafner had toiled hard.

He finished just as the morning dawned.

He was waiting now for Wotan to awaken and to give to him the beautiful Freya.

He would take her and hurry to his own country.

THE PAYMENT

"While you slept I built the castle," said Fafner. "Now I am ready for the payment."

"What payment do you want?" asked Wotan.

"What payment do I want?" shouted Fafner. "Surely you have not forgotten your promise? The price was Freya, and I shall take her home with me."

"Oh, that was only in jest," said Wotan. "I could not think of letting Freya go. But I shall pay you well for the castle. I shall give you something else that will be just as good for you."

Fafner grew very angry and screamed:--

"Cease your foolish talk. I built your beautiful stone palace. I drudged and toiled and heaped the massive rocks. Each stone lies firm and solid in its place, and I will have my pay!"

"But, surely," said Wotan, "you did not think I meant to give you Freya? 'T is she who feeds us golden apples. No one but Freya knows how to make them grow. If it were not for her fresh fruits my family would grow old. They would wither like the autumn flowers."

"Yes," raged Fafner; "I know it is fair Freya's golden apples that keep you young. But now Freya belongs to me. Nothing else will I have."

Just then Wotan saw his brother, Loki, coming over the mountain.

"Wait, Fafner! Wait until I can talk with my brother about this!"

LOKI

"Loki, why are you so late?" complained Wotan, when Loki came.

Loki was much excited.

"The Rhine-daughters are in great trouble, Wotan. As I was coming by the river I heard them weeping and wailing. Black Alberich has stolen their gold, and I promised them that I would tell you about it. Perhaps you could help them."

"I have no time for the Rhine-daughters now," said Wotan. "I have trouble of my own. Tell me how I can save poor Freya!"

For many years Fafner had heard of this lump of gold. So he listened to all that Loki told. Then he asked: "Why does Alberich want the gold?"

"Because," replied Loki, "the gold can be made into a magic ring; if the one who would make the ring will forever give up all love, the magic ring will make its owner master of the whole wide world. Alberich declared that love was nothing to him if he could have all the gold he wanted."

To himself Fafner thought: "Perhaps it would be better for me to have the gold than to have Freya and her golden apples." Then aloud he said: "Let me tell you what I am willing to do, Wotan. If you will get that

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