

## II.

It is good and most encouraging for us, to find that the German Spirit, when with the second half of last century it raised itself from its deepest decay, did not require a new birth, but merely a resurrection: across two desert centuries it could stretch its hands to the selfsame spirit, which then strewed wide its lusty seeds through all the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation,\* and whose effect upon even the plastic shape of Europe's civilisation we can never deem of small account if we remember that the beautiful, the manifoldly individual, the imaginative German costume of those days was adopted by every European nation. Look at two portraits: here Dürer, there Leibnitz; what a horror at the unhappy period of our downfall is awoken in us by the contrast! Hail to the glorious spirits who first felt deep this horror, and cast their gaze across the centuries to recognise themselves once more! Then was found, that it had not been drowsiness that plunged the German Folk into its misery; it had fought its war of thirty years for its spiritual freedom; that was won, and though the body was faint with wounds and loss of blood, the mind stayed free, even beneath French full-bottomed wigs. Hail Winckelmann and Lessing, ye who, beyond the centuries of native German majesty, found the German's ure-kinsmen in the divine Hellenes, and laid bare the pure ideal of human beauty to the powder-bleared eyes of French-civilised mankind! Hail to thee, Goethe, thou who hadst power to wed Helena to our Faüst, the Greek ideal to the German spirit! Hail to thee, Schiller, thou who gavest to the reborn spirit the stature of the "German stripling" (*des "deutschen Jünglings"*), who stands disdainful of the pride of Britain, the sensuous wiles of Paris! Who was this "deutsche Jüngling"? Has anyone heard of a French,

\* Cf. Hans Sachs' closing speech in *Die Meistersinger*, particularly its last words: "Und gebt ihr ihrem Wirken Gunst, zerging' in Dunst das heil'ge röm'sche Reich, uns bliebe gleich die heil'ge deutsche Kunst."—TR.

an English "Jüngling"? And *yet* how plain and clear beyond mistake, we understand this "German Jüngling"! This stripling, who in Mozart's virginal melodies beshamed the Italian capons; in Beethoven's Symphony grew up to courage of the man, for dauntless, world-redeeming deeds! And this stripling it was, who threw himself at last upon the battle-field when his princes had lost everything, Empire, country, honour; to reconquer for the Folk its freedom, for the Princes e'en their forfeit thrones. And how was this "Jüngling" repaid? In all history there is no blacker ingratitude, than the German princes' treachery to the spirit of their people; and many a good, a noble and self-sacrificing deed of theirs, will it need to atone for that betrayal. We hope for those deeds, and therefore let the sin be told right loudly!

How was it possible that the Princes should have passed in total silence the incomparably glorious resurrection of the German Spirit, not even have thence derived the smallest change in their opinion of their people's character? How explain this incredible blindness, which absolutely knew not so much as how to use that infinitely stirring spirit for the furthering of their dynastic policy? —The reason of the German heart's perversity in these highest regions of the German nation, of all places, lies certainly both deep and far away; in part, perchance, in just the universal scope of German nature. The German *Reich* was no narrow national State, and far as heaven from what hovers nowadays before the longing fancy of the weaker, downtrod and dissevered races of the nation. The sons of German Kaisers had to learn no less than four distinct European languages, to fit them for due converse with the members of the *Reich*. The fortunes of all Europe were assembled in the political forecast of the German Kaiser's court; and never, even at the Empire's lowest ebb, did this dispensation wholly change. Only, the Imperial court at Vienna, through its weakness over against the *Reich*, at last was rather led by Spanish and Romish interests than exercised its

influence over them; so that at its most fateful era the *Reich* was like an inn in which the host no longer, but the guests make out the reckoning. Whilst the Viennese court had thus completely fallen into the Romo-Spanish rut, at its only substantial rival, the court of Berlin, the mastering tendency was that of French civilisation; which had already fully drawn into its groove the courts of lesser princes, the Saxon at their head. By the fostering of Art these courts, at bottom, meant nothing more than the procuring a French ballet or an Italian opera; and, taken strictly, they have not advanced one step beyond the notion till this day. God knows what would have become of Goethe and Schiller if the first, born well-to-do, had not won the personal friendship of a minor German prince, the Weimar wonder, and eventually been enabled in that position to provide to some extent for Schiller! Presumably they would not have been spared the lot of Lessing, Mozart, and so many another noble spirit. But the "deutsche Jüngling" was not the man to need the "smile of Princes," in the sense of a Racine or a Lully: he was called to throw aside the "curb of rules," and as there, so here in the people's life, to step forth a liberator from oppression. This calling was recognised by an intelligent statesman at the time of utmost want; and, when all the red-tape armies of our monarchs had been utterly routed by the holder of French power—in- vading no longer as a curled and frizzled Civiliser, but as a ravenous lord of War; when the German princes were no longer servants to mere French civilisation, but vassals to French political despotism: then was it the German "Jüngling" whose aid was invoked, to prove with weapons in his hand the mettle of this German Spirit reborn within him. He shewed the world its patent of nobility. To the sound of lyre and sword\* he fought its battles. Amazed, the Gallic Cæsar asked why

\* An allusion to Körner's patriotic songs, as set to music by Weber in September 1814. These songs were the means of arousing the utmost patriotic enthusiasm among the youths and younger men of Germany.—TR.

he no longer could beat the Cossacks and Croats, the Imperial and Royal Guards? Perhaps his nephew is the only man, on all the thrones of Europe, who really knows the answer to that question: he knows and *fears* the German "Jüngling." Learn ye to know him too, for ye should *love* him!

But in what consisted the huge ingratitude wherewith the German princes recompensed the saving deeds of this German spirit? They were rid of the French oppressors; but French civilisation they enthroned again, to hug its leading-strings as ever. Merely the great-grandsons of that Louis XIV were to be installed in power once more; and indeed it looks as if their only care besides, was to enjoy their Ballet and their Opera in peace again. To these regained delights they merely added one thing: fear of the German Spirit. The "Jüngling" who had rescued them, must pay for having shewn his undreamt power. A more lamentable misunderstanding, than that which now prevailed throughout a whole half-century in Germany twixt Folk and Princes, history would find it hard to point to; and yet that misunderstanding is the only decent shadow of an excuse for the ingratitude exhibited. If the German spirit had erewhile stayed unnoticed merely out of lethargy and corrupted taste, now, when its strength had proved itself upon the battle-field, the rulers confounded it with the spirit of the French Revolution—for everything had really to be looked at through French spectacles. The German stripling who had doffed his soldier's uniform and, in lieu of the French tail-coat (*Frack*), had reached back to the old-German gown (*Rock*), was soon considered a Jacobin who devoted his time at German universities to nothing less than universal schemes of regicide. Or is this taking the kernel of the misunderstanding a shade too literally? So much the worse, if we are to suppose that the spirit of German Rebirth indeed was grasped correctly, and hostile measures taken against it of set purpose. With deep sorrow must we confess that ignorance and knowledge here appear to stand not all too

wide apart; for that would mean that the deplorable consequences of a purposely-fostered misunderstanding could be explained on none but the lowest grounds of lax and vulgar love of pleasure. For how did the "deutsche Jüngling" bear himself, returning home from war? Assuredly he strove to bring the German spirit into active efficacy in Life itself; but no meddling with actual Politics was his object; no, nothing but the renewing and strengthening of personal and social morality. Plainly is this spoken in the founding of the "Burschenschaft." \* It well became the young fighters of the nation's battles, to take strong arms against the savage brawls and hectorings of German student-life, to put down debauchery and drunkenness; on the other hand, to institute a strenuous and systematic training of the body, to do

\* According to Brockhaus' *Conversations-Lexikon*, the first "Burschenschaft" (from "Bursch," a "fellow, youngster"—one might say, a "scrub") was founded at Jena University, on June 12, 1815, partly by students who had fought in the War of Liberation, partly by members of the old university—"Landsmannschaften." Its motto was: "Honour, Freedom, Fatherland." Its objects were those stated above, and its example was soon followed by almost every university in Germany proper. In two or three years' time a general conclave, with annual sittings, was formed from among these Burschenschaften, under the name of "Burschentag." At this sort of minor parliament the chief business from 1827 to 1831 was a dispute between the so-called *Germanen*, a more practically political party, and the *Arminen* (henceforth in a minority) who made chiefly for an *ideal* unity of the Fatherland and its attainment by means of the original objects of the Burschenschaft. Already after Kotzebue's murder by a German student in March, 1819, the Burschenschaft had been denounced, and some of its members 'examined' for "demagogism"; but after the "Frankfort Attempt" of 1833 (a rising in which certain students had taken part) the legal prosecutions became numerous; sentences of death, etc. were passed, though nothing more severe than personal imprisonment—which had a trick of being quite severe enough—was really put into execution. In later years milder counsels appear to have prevailed again, on both sides.

The "Landsmannschaften" date almost as far back as the universities themselves. In these the members were enrolled according to what one may call sub-national districts—at least the divisions were given territorial names—with all the evil consequences of inflaming local, or at least sectional, animosity. At the time when Wagner was at the Leipzig University both species of groups seem to have co-existed, an interesting account whereof will be found in a note on the "Corps Saxonia" in Glasenapp's Appendix to the third edition of his *Leben Richard Wagner's*.—TR.

away with cursing and swearing, and to crown true piety of heart with the vow of noble chastity.\* French civilisation had found the degenerate mercenaries of the Thirty Years' War besotted with the vices here attacked: to polish down and tinker up that rawness, with its aid, to the Princes seemed sufficient for all time. But now the German Youth itself designed to earn the praise erewhile bestowed by Tacitus upon the "deutsche Jüngling." What other people has a similar event to shew in all the history of its culture?

Truly a quite unparalleled phenomenon. Here was nothing of that gloomy, tyrannous asceticism which at times has passed across Romanic peoples and left no trace behind: for this Youth was—wonderful to say!—devout (*fromm*) without being churchly. It is as though the spirit of Schiller, the tenderest and noblest of his ideal creations, here meant to take on flesh and blood upon a soil of ancient home. The social and political development to which it could not but have led, if the Princes had only understood this youthful spirit of their Folk, is surely past our rating high enough, our imagining its beauty. The aberrations of the un-advised were soon made use of for its ruin. Taunts and persecution tarried not to nip its flower in the bud. The old *Landsmannschaften* system, with all its vicious and deranging influence on youth, was given another lease of life, to oppose and ridicule the Burschenschaft; till at last, when the certainly not unintentionally aggravated blunders had begun to take a sinister and passionate character, the time had come for instructing the criminal courts to put a violent end to this German "league of demagogues."—The only thing left over from the time of Germany's revival, was the military organisation retained by Prussia: with this last remnant of the German spirit, uprooted everywhere else, the Prussian crown won the battle of Königgrätz,† to all the world's

\* Cf. "The German's Fate in Paris," in *The Meister*, No. XIX, p. 86.—TR.

† Commonly, but erroneously, known in England and France as the Battle of Sadowa, in which Prussia inflicted a crushing defeat upon Austria, July 3, 1866.—TR.

amazement, after the lapse of half a century. So great was the terror at this host in every European Ministry of War, that an anxious longing needs must seize the French commander-in-chief himself [Marshal Niel], regarded as the mightiest of them all, to introduce a something like this "Landwehr" into his so rightly famous army. We have seen, not long ago, how the whole French people kicked against the thought. So that French Civilisation has not accomplished what the downtrod German Spirit so quickly and so lastingly succeeded in: the formation of a true Folk-army. As makeweight, it is busying itself with the invention of new weapons [chassepots], breech-loaders and infantry-cannon. How will Prussia reply to that? Likewise by perfecting her armour, or—by putting to good use the knowledge of its true means of power, at present not to be learnt from it by any European people?—Since that memorable battle, on whose eve the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the German Burschenschaft was celebrated, a great turning-point has arrived, and an immeasurably weighty resolution stands at halt: almost it looks as if the Emperor of the French more profoundly judges this importance, than the governments of German princes seem to do. One word from the victor of Königgrätz, and a new power stands erect in history, whereagainst French civilisation will pale its fires for ever.

Let us look closer at the consequences of what we have called that treachery to the German spirit, and see what since, in the course of a full half-century, has become of the seeds of its then so entrancingly hopeful bloom; in what manner German Art and Learning, which once had summoned forth the fairest phases of the people's life, have worked upon the evolution of this people's noble qualities since they were accounted and treated as foes to the quiet, or at all events the ease, of German thrones. Perhaps this survey may lead us to a plainer knowledge of the sins committed; and we then shall try to mildly think of them as failings, as to which we should merely have to stipulate

for betterment, and not for expiation, when we finally admonish to a genuinely redeeming, inner union of the German Princes with their Folks, their imbuelement with the veritable German Spirit.

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### III.

If one takes for granted that it needs times of great political upsoaring, to force the mental qualities of a people to high florescence, one is faced with the question: how comes it, on the contrary, that the German War of Liberation was plainly followed by a terribly rapid falling-off from the previous steady rise? Two issues are included in the answer, one shewing us the dependence, the other the independence, of a nation's artistic genius on the actual stage of its political life. No doubt, the birth of even a great art-genius must stand in some connexion with the spirit of his time and nation; but if we don't propose to seek at random for the secret bonds of that connexion, we certainly shall not do wrongly to leave to Nature her own mystery, and confess that great geniuses are born by laws we cannot fathom. That no genius, such as those the middle of last century brought forth in rich variety, was born in the beginning of the present century, has certainly nothing strictly to do with the political life of the nation; on the other hand, that the high stage of mental receptivity whereto the artistic genius of the German Rebirth had lifted us, so quickly settled down again, that the Folk allowed its ample heritage to be reft from it wellnigh untasted—this, at any rate, may be explained by the spirit of reaction from the fervour of the war of freedom. That the womb of German mothers at that time conceived for us no greater poets than Houwald, Müllner and their compeers, may belong to the inscrutable secret of Nature; but, that these minor talents should have abandoned the free highways of their great German fathers, to wander with quite childish insipidity in a