

lightened him and now was leading him towards a righteous death of expiation in peace and surety of salvation. And he abode by this without a moment's blenching, through fourteen-months' imprisonment, devoured by festering wounds, racked on the sordid plank of suffering.—It was a clever Jew, Börne by name, who first made merry at this deed ; nor did Heine, if our memory serves us, allow it to escape his wit. What the nation felt, is not quite clear ; the only certainty is, that the German Theatre belonged to Kotzebue's spiritual heirs. At this theatre we still will look a little closer, and that in earnest.

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## X.

The line now struck by the German Theatre, in force of the reaction already described by us, could hardly be kept to its full corruptive tendence without a direct and definite influence from the sphere of political power. The new, seductive social station, now allotted to the Theatre, became the weightiest engine of that influence. Entirely alienated from the spirit of their people, the Princes hitherto had entertained their courts with nothing but Italian and French opera-, ballet-, and comedian-companies : the German play and *Singspiel* had been set before the genuine public in wretched show-booths, by ill-nourished, mostly strolling players, conducted and hawked around on strictly industrial principles. They alone comprised the real stage-handicraft, in its good and evil sense. But now that everything was taking a nobler, more human form of energy through the rebirth of the German art-spirit, the municipal and royal authorities, led by men of good will and artistic feeling (among whom the German nobles, then mindful of their rank and freedom, shewed out to marked advantage), bethought them of extending to these strolling troops, which they were surprised to find displaying certain sterling talents, a social patronage conducive to the weal of Art itself. A shining

example (great Princes' weightiest means of influence) had been set by the fervid Kaiser Joseph II. of Austria: in Vienna had arisen the first Court- and National-theatre; in its two divisions,\* together with Opera and Ballet at least, the German Play was cultivated by well-tended companies, now taken into the Imperial pay. For a considerable time, in fact until it likewise fell beneath the universally ruinous influence of the Abject—a curious art-tendence which we soon shall have to characterise a little more precisely—Germany owed to this earliest institute its best school of acting and the longest preservation of the style peculiar to the German, the so-called “true-to-Nature”: a tendence not itself directed to the Ideal, but at all events the basis whence the German may arrive at the Ideal. This admirable example was swiftly copied almost everywhere. The courts, inspired by nothing but a feeling of philanthropy (for one left them in undisturbed possession of their Italian Opera and Ballet, and even of French Comedy where needful) committed the technical conduct of the Theatre to men well-versed in Art, and mostly by profession: the Duke of Weimar handed it to his friend Goethe; in Berlin it was directed by a great comedian, Iffland. That was the time of promise; then things went Germanly and honestly. Had they continued in this happy vein, the shortcomings of every standing theatric enterprise on German soil would soon have come to observation; the proper remedy, the way to organise the German Theatre in the sense of all truly healthy German institutions—which have to answer needs and usages quite other than those, for instance, of the Parisian public—and the way to make it nobly productive, must soon have been discovered, and discovered it would have been.—

But now the whole thing took another aspect: Kotzebue had been murdered; a student in the old-German gown had stabbed him. What did it mean? Plainly something most insidious lurked behind. In any case it seemed pru-

\* Cf. Vol. III., page 365.—TR.

dent to effect a clearance of the old-German gowns, and make Kotzebue's cause one's own. "Out upon the German lumber! The Theatre has become a *point d'honneur* of the Court. Out, ye men who know your business, or to your rightful place as humble hodmen! The regular court-cavalier alone understands the new tence." We have been told of a twenty-two-year-old hunting-page, who, simply because he knew nothing whatever about it, was made Intendant of a theatre; he directed the art-establishment, entrusted to him, for considerably over a quarter of a century\*; once we heard him candidly declare that nowadays, at any rate, Schiller would never have dared to write a thing like "Tell." Here everything worked by instinct, with no real hint from lucid consciousness, as indeed at most turnings in the world's career; that consciousness began to glimmer only when one had to say straight out what one would *not* have. What one *would* have—it followed so easily and palpably from the foolishest arrangements: why shame oneself by confessing it aloud?

Naturally the ideal point of contact of the mime with the poet must first be blotted out. That was an easy matter. One fed the mime with sugarplums, and let the poet starve. Now were the actor and, especially, the actress clad in brave array: but when the prima donna, or the mighty ballerina came along, the stately Intendant himself sank on his bended knees. Why shouldn't the poor comedian take it in good part? The whole class was lacquered with a certain glistening varnish, giving it the appearance, from a distance, of something between a peer and a demigod. What had formerly been reserved for famed Italian cantatrici and French ballet-danseuses, now spread like a vapour over the whole poor German player-class: to the most admired and oftenest applauded, it smelt as perfume; to the unregarded stopgap, at least as fragrance of baked meats. All the heartlessness and bad

\* Baron von Lüttichau, Intendant of the Dresden Court-theatre in Wagner's time.—T.R.

propensities that lurked in the histrion's nature, were assiduously coaxed forth and solely fostered—again, by the all-directing Instinct: the most repulsive vanity and the most harlot-like complaisance. The monkey, in its most atrocious shape, had been carefully shelled from its Goethe-Schiller chrysalis, and the only remaining question was: what to give it now to imitate?—'Twas easy, and not so easy. As for clothes, so for the Theatre, one held by Paris fashions. Botched and copied: oh! it was soon got ready, and it answered too. But not at every season. In Paris, where each new *pièce* can be played off the reel for over a hundred nights to an immense and constantly changing public, at many theatres at least, one doesn't bring out so much in a whole year as the theatre of a little German provincial city, with its diminutive public, devours in a month. From one entirely disregarded root-offence of our modern German theatric system, the mistake of being obliged to cut an entertaining figure before one and the selfsame public, night in, night out—from this evil, which was bound to result in the utter ridicule of its performances, there have evolved alike the Nemesis upon the whole criminal attempt and the last possibility of rescue from a death by drowning.

What one intended with the Theatre, when one brought it under the immediate management of parade-struck courts, was at any rate assisted by the demoralising influence that could not but extend itself to the more or less industrial establishments still subsisting in the towns. The directors of these minor theatres, mostly non-subsidised and a prey to simple speculation, were forced to try and turn an honest penny out of the superabundance of theatre-evenings by clutching at every drifting straw that offered a distraction. In this wise the German repertory became packed with a monstrous mass of specially-adapted pieces, the property of every age and nation. Seeing that at divers times and in divers tongues a fair amount, nay, much of excellent work has been written for the stage, it also took its bounden turn of penal exercise.

The great Court-theatres fell at last into an altogether similar plight. The gruesome ghost, Finance, which Frederick the Great foresaw would threaten the Papacy itself some day, and most unpleasantly, appeared before the Court-theatre Intendants. The very institution of the new Court-theatre was nothing but a compromise between the Court and Public of a capital: the Court merely furnished the pompous show and the mismanagement; the Public must stand bail for the loss (*Noth*). Thus a second power evolved itself, the revenue-voting Lower House, one of the most remarkable of phenomena—the German theatre-subscriber. The subterranean war in sieges can scarcely shew more interesting tactics, than the wondrous battle-of-the-mines between the Subscriber and the Intendant. They can never come to terms without reciprocal concessions; for the Intendant himself—particularly if his monarch is out of temper at the extravagances for singers, dancers, etc.—has to accommodate his ways to the subscribers; in the long run he has to fly to the expedient of the profit-needing Town-theatre Director, and slip into his sack of bad a grain of good for once in a way. And as the Subscriber takes an occasional trip, if not exactly to Paris, yet to somewhere in the nearer or remoter German neighbourhood where exceptional circumstances have helped something really worth regarding into a provincially timid light of day, he brings back with him, and publishes, the news that all that glitters is not gold: whereupon the ruling tendency toward the Abject is somewhat shaken from its orbit, now and then; which, vexatiously enough, leads on to fresh concessions, nay, finally to the utmost confusion. Then should it chance that a foreign ambassador expresses the longing to taste a little of the Romantic stage-literature of Germany, discussed from time to time abroad (much as the Emperor of Russia wished the Grand-Duke of Weimar to shew him the famous Jena students); or if it happens that a junior prince or, for a rarity, the Monarch himself avows a weakness on any classical side or other,—then Chaos comes to stay.

Reviewers are begged for their literary advice, the learned are dragged on as poets, architects as decorators: everyone shakes hands, exhibits mutual reverence, and the Court-theatre becomes the Pantheon of modern art. And all this groups itself around the happy Mime, who now feels perfectly warranted in babbling of art and the classics. To be sure, an aside, a sly wink of the Intendant's teaches him that things are really not so parlous: "What the gentry are really driving at, good God! these art-twaddlers don't seem to have a notion of. You know!"—"But the subscribers—the ghost?"—"Ah well! Isn't there a way of bringing them to reason?"—One has nothing against Schiller and Goethe; on the contrary, one is only too happy to throw in all the classic poets, right back to Sophocles: only, you musn't expect the actor to duly learn the stuff by heart, when one can give it after all so very seldom, alas! like everything else; but with this distinction, that everything else is much easier to get by heart, and can very well be "played to the prompter."

For beautiful times had come for the mime, when he felt himself in clover, could take a nap for once, and lounge about. From the tedious, tiresome rehearsal, often without waiting it out, to the coffee-house; before the performance billiards or skittles, after the performance beer-house. There you have his faithful round. Admittance behind the wings was still reserved for the aristocrats; in compensation to the town-populace proper, the wings, with all that passes behind them, were brought into the restaurant or tavern. The interest in what one heard there, soon swallowed every other interest that formerly might occupy a city's population. An actor's marriage, a new amour, a quarrel about rôles; whether one would be "called out," increases of salary, star-engagements, how much was to be paid for them,—these were henceforth the grand topics on which the attention of society, the passionate sympathy of the whole public and domestic life, was concentrated in every city where a standing theatre, especially under Court protection, had taken thorough root. Then came the

favourites, their rivals, their personal war, and the warfare of their parties. Now the actor's 'shop,' the comedian's slang became the soul of wit, the jargon of the wings the speech of public and of press; and the most utterly nonsensical words, such as "self-intelligible" ("*selbstverständlich*"), which had plainly been invented for a knockabout parody, were rolled on the tongue with such lasting delight that the grammarian felt bound at last to explain, the foreigner to translate them, had both not been impossible.—Goethe bewailed the improvement of the universities insomuch as it sensibly reduced the number of ruined students, who, having come into some manner of contact with higher intellectual culture, had formerly supplied the Theatre with at least a serviceable material; whereas it now was besieged by the discharged counterjumper, whose only qualification for the stage consisted in a smooth face and a certain shop-agility. Had Goethe been able to foresee into whose hands German trade itself would one day fall, and from what exclusive nationality our Theatre would consequently have to recruit its ranks, he would never have let his "Faust" be so much as printed in book form; for any, were it even the remotest resemblance to a theatre-piece, would certainly have scared him back from publishing his wonder-work. And it was just upon this "Faust" that the full vengeance of theatrical Abjectness was wreaked.

To two summits did the genius of Germany mount up, in its two great poets. The idealistic Schiller reached his in the staunch and solid core of German Folk-nature; to the point whence Goethe had set out, did Schiller return; after he had paced the glorious round of ideality to the transfiguration of Catholic Dogma in "Maria Stuart," with majestic valediction he turned back to "Tell," journeying from the sunset to the sunrise full of hope for nobly German manhood. From the bottomless depths of sensuous-suprasensual yearning, our Goethe soared to the hallowed mystic mountain-top, from whence he gazed into the glory of the world's redemption: with this gaze, which

no ecstatic could ever have cast more raptly or more reverently upon that land beyond approach, the poet parted from us, and left us in his "Faust" his testament.

Two points denote the phases of the German Theatre's descent into the Abject: their names are "Tell" and "Faust."

At the beginning of the 'thirties of the present century, about the middle of the "now-time," the German spirit seemed inclined to shake itself up a little (the Paris July-revolution had given it a nudge); also, one was making a few concessions here and there. The Theatre wanted its share of them: old Goethe was still living. Well-meaning literarians hit upon the thought of bringing his "Faust" to the theatre. It happened. What in itself, and with the best-regulated Theatre, was a fool's attempt, was bound just then to still more cryingly expose the Theatre's already far-advanced decline: but Gretchen proved a "grateful rôle." The noble poem dragged its maimed and mutilated carcass mournfully across the boards: but it seemed to flatter the young people, in especial, to get the public chance of cheering many a remembered word of wit and wisdom.—The theatres had better luck with "Tell," at much about the same time: people in Paris had made it into an opera-text, and no less a man than Rossini himself had set it to music. It was a question, indeed, whether one durst offer the German his "Tell" as a French translated opera? Whoso would fathom once for all the unbridgeable gulf that separates the German spirit from the French, had only to compare this operatic text with Schiller's drama, which had reached the height of popularity in Germany. This was felt by every German, down from the professor to the lowest gymnasiast, even by the comedians themselves, and shame covered them at seeing that hideous travesty of their own best nature; but,—hm!—an opera,—one doesn't take that sort of thing so strictly! The overture, with its noisy ballet-music at the close, had already been received with thunders of applause at classical concert-establishments, close beside the Beethovenian symphony. People shut



one eye. And after all, this opera's goings-on were really very patriotic, in fact more patriotic than in Schiller's "Tell": "*esclavage*" and "*liberté*" made an enormous effect in music. Rossini had taken great pains to compose as solidly as possible: indeed, when listening to many of the ravishingly effective numbers, one could clean forget about "Tell." It went, and is going still; and, looked at in the light of to-day, this "Tell" was quite a classical event in our operatic calendar.—And things went on, and sank, and drowned. After some years, Germany had a Revolution of its own: the colours of the old Burschenschaft\* floated above the palace of the Frankfort Bund. Goethe's hundredth anniversary was dragged on as a sedative. What should one give? "Faust" was no longer of any use. A Parisian composer once more comes to the rescue†: without any other ambition, he gets the Goethian poem translated into the effective jargon needful for his boulevard-public; a repellent, sugary-vulgar patchwork, with all the airs and graces of a lorette, wedded to the music of a second-rate talent that fain would bring itself to something and stretches out an anguished hand to everything. People who had attended a performance in Paris, declared that with *this* opera it would surely be impossible to repeat in Germany what had been gone through, in its day, with Rossini's "Tell." Even the composer, who had simply wished to score a success with his own particular public, there in the Boulevard du Temple, was far from the pretension of venturing to exhibit himself in Germany with this work. But matters turned out otherwise. Like an evangel of bliss, this "Faust" at last swelled full the heart of the German theatre-public, and from every point of view both fools and sages found it really not at all amiss. If to-day one still gives the "Faust" of Goethe as a curiosity, it is merely to shew what a decided progress the Theatre has made since the olden times.

\* The red, yellow and black, adopted by the students (see page 47) as a symbol of German unity.—TR.

† Strictly speaking, not for ten or eleven years; for Gounod's *Faust* was first produced at the Théâtre Lyrique, on March 19th, 1859.—TR.

And certainly the progress is immeasurable. Should the noble example of a sovereign devotee of Art succeed in bringing the Theatre to such a point of efficiency as to open our eyes to its present downfall, that success, were it even to reach the highest thinkable, would be of no more than equal dimensions with our recent progress to the apogee of naked Abjectness.

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## XI.

We have endeavoured to throw a beam of light upon the characteristic physiognomy of affairs whose accurate delineation might occupy the lifetime of some gifted writer. The French have found such a genius, to delineate the ethical condition of their society—yet a genius who, by reason of his choice of subject, the hitherto-unknown realism and tireless perseverance of his drawing of that subject's details, and above all through the utter hopelessness in which he leaves us, appears more like a demon. Balzac, whom the French cannot but marvel at, but would prefer to leave unnoticed, gives striking evidence that only by duping himself can the Frenchman preserve an illusion as to the awful contents of his Culture and his Civilisation: viewed and apprehended with the same eagerness as guides the German in his thorough examination of a Nature-truth, this Culture was bound to reveal to the poet a chaos of ghastly details, strictly connected withal, and mutually explanatory; to have undertaken whose unravelling and reproduction, and to have carried it out with the incredible patience of a poet genuinely in love with his subject, makes of this remarkable writer a phenomenon quite unparalleled in the domain of literature.—'Twere a more than mournful, a pitiable task, to become a Balzac of those evils which have fastened upon the whole public life of the German people through the desolation of its Theatre. To see this public life, not temptingly embellished with the Theatrical as in France, to conceal that hateful substance of French