

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

civilisation which Balzac has exposed, but weighed down by the Theatrical, as has been the case with the Germans, in such wise that a valiant, truthful native substance (which B. Constant so admired in us) has been transformed into a ridiculous grotesque, for every passer-by to scoff at,—this scarcely could inspire the most malicious demon to write a second *Comédie humaine*: at the very least its title would have to be concocted from one of the newer German jargons now in vogue.\*

For ourselves, we know but one way of bringing the problem, inherent in the deeply humiliating state of things above-denoted, to anything like a conscious understanding: namely, by adopting a negative expedient—somewhat curious in itself, but here the only one available—and proving that no sort of consciousness of this problem can be existent, for the simple reason that everyone is personally involved and implicated in that state. We will therefore address a circular interrogatory to all the classes and members of German society, as constituted by the only public life that comes within the purview of the Culture-researcher, asking each in turn for their opinion of the agency of the modern German Theatre: whether they ascribe to it any influence at all; of what kind they deem that influence; and whether, if they recognise that influence as harmful, they know of any remedy?

As standing nearest to the Theatre, our first witnesses shall be the representatives of the ideal tendency in art, the literature-poets and plastic artists. Their temper and attitude towards the Theatre we have already characterised, and therefore, seeking now alike for counsel, we need tarry but a little with them.—When the reaction against the German spirit set in, the literary poet saw himself excluded from the theatre: he cast himself upon the literature-drama, either not reckoned, or else unfitted, for theatrical performance. A first fall: for it was through his aimful observance of stage-requirements, that Schiller became our

\* Perhaps one might suggest: "*Selbstverständnis des jetztzeitlich aufgebesserten und bereiften deutschen Kunstvertriebs.*"—R. WAGNER.

greatest dramatic poet. When the literature-dramatist turned once more to the theatre, it had become a stranger to him, and already something quite distinct from what it was in Schiller's time : the newer French Effect-piece was now the ruling fashion. To copy this as faithfully as possible, and chiefly to clothe themselves about with the skilful mannerism of Parisian Scribe, became the plumb-line for these poets' dealings with the theatre. Moreover, from the leading-article they brought into the theatre the journalist's harangue upon political interests of the day and "time-tendencies" so-called ; from the beloved actor's mouth there spouted the catchword of the parliamentary orator, an unfailing fillip to the audience's applause. Thus: an aping of the foreign, and a falsification of the Drama, reacting upon Literature itself: theatrical-journalistic mongrelism. We shall have to ask the politician and the statesman for the further results on the spirit of the journal-nourished Folk, but will take the present opportunity of renewing our question to the plastic artist: what incentive could he reap from a model which offered itself to him in this manner of stage-trappings, or from a public life under influence of this stage? The literature-poet, however, reduced by this Theatre to a bad, at best a clumsy writer of Effect-pieces,—how can we expect him to tell us that the Theatre has corrupted him, to advise us how to purge away theatrical corruption, when all the time, conceitedly enough, he sets such store by his literary existence as to believe he may view his dealings with the stage in the light of a condescension? What is his only grievance against the Theatre? That he cannot do good business there, because he is throttled by French competition: he wants patriotism at the theatre, wants protective duties to clear those unquestionably better-manufactured French Effect-pieces from the path of his bad imitations. Nothing but this does he think of, when there's talk of theatric reform. Is it of any use turning to him for help? Will he so much as be able to understand us?

Must it be an even harder undertaking, to bring to the

plastic artist's consciousness the Theatre's ruinous influence upon his art in particular, since he fancies he stands quite beyond its reach, we will pass him by for now, and address ourselves somewhat more definitely to the *musician*.—What is the complaint of the German musician? Firstly, that he can make no headway outside the concert-room,—whereby he confesses that his relation to the Theatre is exactly the same as the literature-poet's: namely, since ever he gave up composing un-theatric operas, and tried to copy the Parisian Opera, the maladroitness of his imitation has left him handicapped by the original; and he, too, must therefore wish for patriotic measures at the theatre, when everything would go quite otherwise and he would be able at last to bring off something. But our good friend the German musician has another, and a very different ground for startled outcry; a ground he would have to explain by the desolation of the German Theatre, were he only able to explain a thing like that at all. Whence this imbecile uncertainty and unreliableness in the musical taste of just the German public, which in other respects is really the most musical of publics, and has seen the German Folk give birth to the greatest musicians of the world? That even in the closest-guarded concert-establishments one is compelled, beside the nurture of the noblest, purest art, to make the most dishonouring concessions to vulgarest virtuoso-triviality; and moreover has to admit that the very audience which here assembles for Bach and Beethoven, falls into still greater ecstasies when a famous Italian bravura-singeress drives away all memory of music,—this rolls around in the gentlemen's heads, no doubt; but when they have digested it so long, that they fancy they may as well print it, on whom do they pin the blame? Look you! upon the poor public itself, for being what it is.\*

The sordid tendency that has prevented the Theatre from raising itself to an equally noble height with German

\* See Ferd. Hiller's "*Aus dem Tonleben der Gegenwart. Gelegentliches.*" Second Volume: "*Die Musik und das Publikum.*"—R. WAGNER.

Instrumental-music, and the overwhelming influence of the Theatre in general, which not even the best propensities of the public are able to withstand—it never occurs to the gentlemen to think of this. They opine, indeed, that the Theatre is harmful to the musical good-sense of the public: but that what thus harms the latter is still more harmful to the former, and that this is not the Theatre itself, but the evil tendency imposed upon it, they never dream of; no, they assume that by no possibility can the Theatre be anything else, than just what it has become. If one looked to the German musician for help, in what a ridiculous dilemma it would place him! For this is what he thinks, at bottom: what on earth has the Theatre to do with Music? That without the pursuit of a tendency fundamentally different from that of the present Theatre, the German sense of music, nay, the spirit of German Music itself must sink into a desolation exactly like that now arrived-at by the Theatre,—how is it possible to make this intelligible to these gentry, notwithstanding that they hear their condemnation bellowed out from every alley, and the very Frenchman already knows better how to render their best music than they themselves?—

Let us now turn from the artistic classes that only indirectly work upon the spirit of the nation, to those representatives of public intellectual culture into whose immediate tutelage the nation is given over.—

How stands the *School* towards the Theatre?—

In the past century, when the School was labouring under the full incubus of pedantry and what we now call "*Zopf*" ("pigtail"), there evolved from it a Winckelmann, a Lessing, Wieland, and a Goethe. When Lessing cast himself upon the Theatre, he was excommunicated by the School: yet Lessing, of all men, is quite unthinkable without the education he received in just that School. Rightly enough: for that School still clove to the classic principle of Humanism, whence had issued the great figures and great movements of the era of Rebirth and Reformation. Greek and Roman classics formed the groundwork

of these schools, in which the purely utilitarian was as good as unknown, or not yet advocated. Despite the character of utter dryness and sterility that necessarily stamped itself upon classical studies in the days of the German spirit's deepest decline, through their lack of any living fecundation from just that spirit, the Schools at least maintained alive the source of all fair humanising culture of more recent times; in a similar, though converse, fashion as the Mastersingers of Nuremburg, at the prime of classic Humanism, preserved for the eye of genius the old-German mode of poetry. It was a time of fairest hope, when Goethe, nursed in that school of Classic pedantry, sang his stalwart praises of the scoffed-at and forgotten Hans Sachs; when he triumphantly expounded Erwin's Strassburg minster to the world,—when the spirit of old Classicism took fresh life unto itself from the poet-warmth of our great masters, and from the stage the "Bride of Messina" re-illumed in age and youth the study of the mighty Greeks. Then 'twas no shame for the School, to go hand in hand with the Theatre: the teacher knew that what his pupils could not learn from him, they there would learn, and with him—noble, vibrant warmth in the judgment of those great problems of life to which the pupil was then brought up.

Here came to consciousness and received its plain expression, what *German* is: to wit, the thing one does for its own sake, for very joy of doing it; whereas Utilitarianism, namely the principle whereby a thing is done for sake of some personal end, ulterior to the thing itself, was shewn to be un-German. The German virtue herein expressed thus coincided with the highest principle of æsthetics, through it perceived, according to which the 'objectless' (*das Zwecklose*) alone is beautiful, because, being an end (*Zweck*) in itself, in revealing its nature as lifted high above all vulgar ends it reveals at like time that to reach whose sight and knowledge alone makes ends of life worth following; whereas everything that serves an end is hideous, because neither its fashioner nor its on-

looker can have aught before him save a disquieting conglomerate of fragmentary material, which is first to gain its meaning and elucidation from its employment for some vulgar need.—None but a great nation, confiding with tranquil stateliness in its unshakable might, could ripen such a principle within itself, and bring it into application for the happiness of all the world: for it assuredly presupposes a solid ordering of every nearer, every relation that serves life's necessary ends; and it was the duty of the political powers to found that order in this lofty, world-redeeming sense,—that is to say: *Germany's Princes should have been as German, as were its own great masters.* If this foundation fell away, then the German must come to the ground for very reason of his merit: and that's what he has done to-day, where German he has stayed.

But, let us have no care! People knew of a means of rescue. The "Now-time" had arrived. Let us see how things go with the School, in it!—

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## XII.

About the School, especially in Catholic Germany, the Church and State to-day are striving: manifestly because each has its own end in view. The Church upbraids the State with aiming at nothing in the School but a materialistic, a utilitarian education of the people, and claims it as her duty to see that man's highest spiritual interests, which undeniably are his religious interests, shall not suffer harm from this training for sheer utilitarian ends. Plainly the Church here appears in the most advantageous of lights. Only, the State replies with the proof, or at least the apprehension, that the Church is merely endeavouring through the School to found for herself a political power, an imperium in imperio; that religion is simply her means, whereas her end is Hierarchy, which would give rise to great confusion in the State and finally would burden it with an uneducated populace, unfitted for