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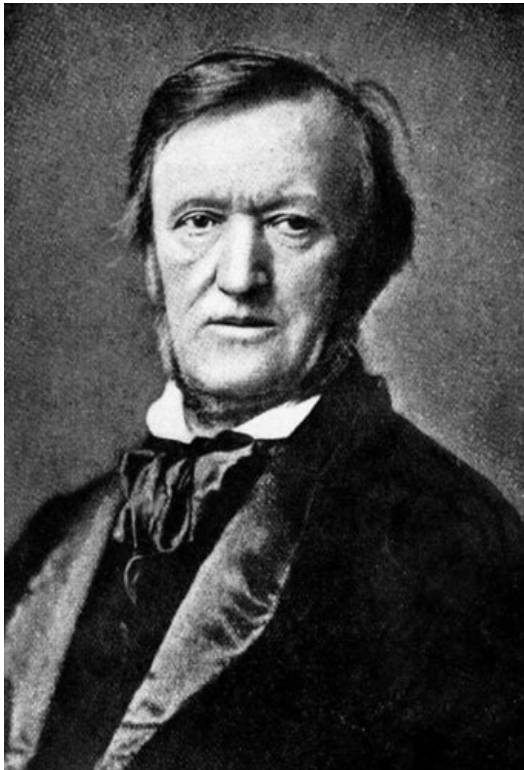
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[Pg 1]



Richard Wagner

[Pg 2]

# PARSIFAL

*Story and Analysis of  
Wagner's Great Opera*

By

H. R. HAWEIS

Author of "My Musical Memories," "Music and Morals," etc.



FUNK & WAGNALLS COMPANY

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1905  
[Pg 3]

**NOTE—**

This story and analysis of Parsifal was first published as a part of Mr. Haweis' well-known work, "My Musical Memories." The interest it has excited seems to justify its republication at this time in a separate volume.

F. & W. Co.

*Published, February, 1904*

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## WAHNFRIED

I visited Bayreuth on the 24th of July, 1883, and attended two crowded performances of Wagner's last work, *Parsifal*. In the morning I went into the beautiful gardens of the Neue Schloss. On either side of a lake, upon which float a couple of swans and innumerable water-lilies, the long parklike avenue of trees are vocal with wild doves, and the robin is heard in the adjoining thickets. At my approach the sweet song ceases abruptly, and the startled bird flies out, scattering the pale [Pg 7]petals of the wild roses upon my path. I follow a stream of people on foot, as they move down the left-hand avenue in the garden of the Neue Schloss, which adjoins Wagner's own grounds.

Some are going—some are coming. Presently I see an opening in the bushes on my left; the path leads me to a clump of evergreens. I follow it, and come suddenly on the great composer's grave. All about the green square mound the trees are thick—laurel, fir, and yew. The shades fall funereally across the immense gray granite slab; but over the dark foliage the sky is bright blue, and straight in front of me, above the low bushes, I can see the bow-windows of the dead master's study—where I spent with him one delightful evening in 1876.

I can see, too, the jet of water that he[Pg 8] loved playing high above the hedge of evergreen. It lulls me with its sound. "Wahnfried! Wahnfried!" it seems to murmur. It was the word written above the master's house—the word he most loved—the word his tireless spirit most believed in. How shall I render it? "Dream-life! dream-life! Earth's illusion of joy!"

Great spirit! thy dream-life here is past, and, face to face with truth, "rapt from the fickle and the frail," for thee the illusion has vanished! Mayest thou also know the fulness of joy in the unbroken and serene activities of the eternal Reality!

I visited the grave twice. There is nothing written on the granite slab. There were never present less than[Pg 9] twenty persons, and a constant stream of pilgrims kept coming and going.

One gentle token of the master's pitiful and tender regard for the faithful dumb animals he so loved lies but a few feet off in the same garden, and not far from his own grave.

Upon a mossy bank, surrounded with evergreens, is a small marble slab, with this inscription to his favorite dog:

"*Here lies in peace 'Wahnfried's' faithful watcher and friend—the good and beautiful Mark*" (der gute, schöne Mark)!

I returned, too, to Wagner's tomb, plucked a branch of the fir-tree that waved above it, and went back to my room to prepare myself by reading and meditation for the great religious drama[Pg 10] which I was to witness at four o'clock in the afternoon—Wagner's latest and highest inspiration—the story of the sacred brotherhood, the knights of San Graal—*Parsifal*![Pg 11]

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## PARSIFAL

The blood of God!—mystic symbol of divine life—"for the blood is the life thereof." That is the key-note of *Parsifal*, the Knight of the Sangrail. Wine is the ready symbolical vehicle—the material link between the divine and the human life. In the old religions, that heightened consciousness, that intensity of feeling produced by stimulant, was thought to be the very entering in of the "god"—the union of the divine and human spirit; and in the Eleusinian mysteries, the "sesame," the bread of Demeter, the earth mother,[Pg 12] and the "kykeon," or wine of Dionysos, the vine god, were thus sacramental.

The passionate desire to approach and mingle with Deity is the one mystic bond common to all religions in all lands. It is the "cry of the human;" it traverses the ages, it exhausts many symbols and transcends all forms.

To the Christian it is summed up in the "Lord's Supper."

The medieval legend of the Sangrail (real or royal blood) is the most poetic and pathetic form of transubstantiation; in it the gross materialism of the Roman Mass almost ceases to be repulsive; it possesses the true legendary power of attraction and assimilation.

As the Knights of the Table Round, with their holy vows, provided medieval[Pg 13] Chivalry with a center, so did the Lord's table, with its Sangrail, provide medieval Religion with its central attractive point. And as all marvelous tales of knightly heroism circled round King Arthur's table, so did the great legends embodying the Christian conceptions of sin, punishment, and redemption circle round the Sangrail and the sacrifice of the "Mass."

In the legends of *Parsifal* and *Lohengrin* the knightly and religious elements are welded together. This is enough. We need approach *Parsifal* with no deep knowledge of the various Sagas made use of by Wagner in his drama. His disciples, while most eager to trace its various elements to their sources, are most emphatic in declaring that the *Parsifal* drama, so intimately true to the spirit of[Pg 14] Roman Catholicism, is nevertheless a new creation.

Joseph of Arimathea received in a crystal cup the blood of Christ as it flowed from the spear-wound made by the Roman soldier. The cup and the spear were committed to Titurel, who became a holy knight and head of a sacred brotherhood of knights. They dwelt in the Visigoth Mountains of Southern Spain, where, amid impenetrable forests, rose the legendary palace of Montsalvat. Here they guarded the sacred relics, issuing forth at times from their palatial fortress, like Lohengrin, to fight for innocence and right, and always returning to renew their youth and strength by the celestial contemplation of the Sangrail, and by occasional participation in the holy feast.[Pg 15]

Time and history count for very little in these narratives. It was allowed, however, that Titurel the Chief had grown extremely aged, but it was not allowed that he could die in the presence of the Sangrail. He seemed to have been laid in a kind of trance, resting in an open tomb beneath the altar of the Grail; and whenever the cup was uncovered his voice might be heard joining in the celebration. Meanwhile, Amfortas, his son, reigned in his stead.

Montsalvat, with its pure, contemplative, but active brotherhood, and its mystic cup, thus stands out as the poetic symbol of all that is highest and best in medieval Christianity.

The note of the wicked world—Magic for Devotion—Sensuality for Worship[Pg 16]breaks in upon our vision, as the scene changes from the Halls of Montsalvat to Klingsor's palace. Klingsor, an impure knight, who has been refused admittance to the order of the "Sangrail," enters into a compact with the powers of evil—by magic acquires arts of diabolical fascination—fills his palace and gardens with enchantments, and wages bitter war against the holy knights, with a view of corrupting them, and ultimately, it may be, of acquiring for himself the "Sangrail," in which all power is believed to reside. Many knights have already succumbed to the "insidious arts" of Klingsor; but the tragical turning-point of the *Parsifal* is that Amfortas, himself the son of Titurel, the official guardian of the Grail, in making war upon the[Pg 17] magician, took with him the sacred spear, and *lost* it to Klingsor.

It came about in this way. A woman of unearthly loveliness won him in the enchanted bowers adjoining the evil knight's palace, and Klingsor, seizing the holy spear, thrust it into Amfortas's side, inflicting what seemed an incurable wound. The brave knight, Gurnemanz, dragged his master fainting from the garden, his companions of the Sangrail covering their retreat. But, returned to Montsalvat, the unhappy king awakes only to bewail his sin, the loss of the sacred spear, and the ceaseless harrowing smart of an incurable wound. But who is Parsifal?

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The smell of pine woods in July! The [Pg 18] long avenue outside the city of Bayreuth, that leads straight up the hill, crowned by the Wagner Theater, a noble structure—architecturally admirable—severe, simple, but exactly adapted to its purpose. I join the stream of pilgrims, some in carriages, others on foot. As we approach, a clear blast of trombones and brass from the terrace in front of the grand entrance plays out the Grail "motive." It is the well-known signal—there is no time to be lost. I enter at the prescribed door, and find myself close to my appointed place. Every one—such is the admirable arrangement—seems to do likewise. In a few minutes about one thousand persons are seated without confusion. The theater is darkened, the footlights are lowered, the prelude begins. [Pg 19]

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## Act I

The waves of sound rise from the shadowy gulf sunken between the audience and the footlights. Upon the sound ocean of "wind" the "Take, eat," or "Love-feast" motive floats. Presently the strings pierce through it, the Spear motive follows, and then, full of heavy pain, "Drink ye all of this," followed by the famous Grail motive—an old chorale also used by Mendelssohn in the Reformation Symphony. Then comes the noble Faith and Love theme.

As I sit in the low light, amid the silent throng, and listen, I need no interpreter [Pg 20]—I am being placed in possession of the emotional key-notes of the drama. Every subject is first distinctly enunciated, and then all are wondrously blended together. There is the pain of sacrifice—the mental agony, the bodily torture; there are the alternate pauses of Sorrow and respite from sorrow long drawn out, the sharp ache of Sin, the glimpses of unhallowed Joy, the strain of upward Endeavor, the serene peace of Faith and Love, crowned by the blessed Vision of the Grail. 'Tis past. The prelude melts into the opening recitative.

The eyes have now to play their part. The curtain rises, the story begins. The morning breaks slowly, the gray streaks redden, a lovely summer landscape lies bathed in primrose light. Under the [Pg 21] shadow of a noble tree, the aged knight. Gurnemanz, has been resting with two young attendants. From the neighboring halls of Montsalvat the solemn *reveillé*—the Grail motive—rings out, and all three sink on their knees in prayer. The sun bursts forth in splendor as the hymn rises to mingle with the voices of universal nature. The waves of sound well up and fill the soul with unspeakable thankfulness and praise.

The talk is of Amfortas, the king, and of his incurable wound. A wild gallop, a rush of sound—and a weird woman, with streaming hair, springs toward the startled group. She bears a phial with rare balsam from the Arabian shores. It is for the king's wound. Who is the wild horsewoman? Kundry—strange crea [Pg 22] tion—a being doomed to wander, like the Wandering Jew, the wild Huntsman, or Flying Dutchman, always seeking a deliverance she can not find—Kundry, who, in ages gone by, met the Savior on the road to Calvary and derided him. Some say she was Herodias's daughter. Now filled with remorse, yet weighted with sinful longings, she serves by turns the Knights of the Grail, then falls under the spell of Klingsor, the evil knight sorcerer, and, in the guise of an enchantress, is compelled by him to seduce, if possible, the Knights of the Grail.

Eternal symbol of the divided allegiance of a woman's soul! She it was who, under the sensual spell, as an incarnation of loveliness, overcame Amfortas, and she it is now who, in her [Pg 23] ardent quest for salvation, changed and squalid in appearance, serves the Knights of the Grail, and seeks to heal Amfortas's wound!

No sooner has she delivered her balsam to the faithful Gurnemanz, and thrown herself exhausted upon the grass—where she lies gnawing her hair morosely—than a change in the sound atmosphere, which never ceases to be generated in the mystic orchestral gulf, presages the approach of Amfortas.

He comes, borne on a litter, to his morning bath in the shining lake hard by. Sharp is the pain of the wound—weary and hopeless is the king. Through the Wound-motive comes the sweet woodland music and the breath of the blessed morning, fragrant with flowers and fresh [Pg 24] with dew. It is one of those incomparable bursts of woodland notes, full of bird-song and the happy hum of insect life and rustling of netted branches and waving of long tasseled grass. I know of nothing like it save the forest music in *Siegfried*.

The sick king listens, and remembers words of hope and comfort that fell from a heavenly voice, what time the glory of the Grail passed:

"Durch Mitleid wissend  
Der reine Thor,  
Harre sein  
Den ich erkor."  
[Wait for my chosen one,  
Guileless and innocent,  
Pity-enlightened.]

They hand him the phial of balsam; [Pg 25] and presently, while the lovely forest music again breaks forth, the king is carried on to his bath, and Kundry, Gurnemanz, and the two esquires hold the stage.

As the old knight, who is a complete repertory of facts connected with the Grail tradition, unfolds to the esquires the nature of the king's wound, the sorceries of Klingsor, the hope of deliverance from some unknown "guileless one," a

sudden cry breaks up the situation.

A white swan, pierced by an arrow, flutters dying to the ground. It is the swan beloved of the Grail brotherhood, bird of fair omen, symbol of spotless purity. The slayer is brought in between two knights—a stalwart youth, fearless,[Pg 26] unabashed, while the death-music of the swan, the slow distilling and stiffening of its life-blood, is marvelously rendered by the orchestra. Conviction of his fault comes over the youth as he listens to the reproaches of Gurnemanz. He hangs his head ashamed and penitent, and at last, with a sudden passion of remorse, snaps his bow and flings it aside. The swan is borne off, and Parsifal, the "guileless one" (for he it is), with Gurnemanz and Kundry—who rouses herself and surveys Parsifal with strange, almost savage curiosity—hold the stage.

In this scene Kundry tells the youth more than he cares to hear about himself: how his father, Gamuret, was a great knight killed in battle; how his mother, Herzeleide (Heart's Affliction),[Pg 27] fearing a like fate for her son, brought him up in the lonely forest; how he left her to follow a troop of knights that he met one day winding through the forest glade, and being led on and on in pursuit of them, never overtook them and never returned to his mother, Heart's Affliction, who died of grief. At this point the frantic youth seizes Kundry by the throat in an agony of rage and grief, but is held back by Gurnemanz, till, worn out by the violence of his emotion, he faints away, and is gradually revived by Kundry and Gurnemanz.

Suddenly, Kundry rises with a wild look, like one under a spell. Her mood of service is over. She staggers across the stage—she can hardly keep awake. "Sleep," she mutters, "I must sleep[Pg 28]—sleep!" and falls down in one of those long trances which apparently last for months, or years, and form the transition periods between her mood of Grail service and the Klingsor slavery into which she must next relapse in spite of herself.

And is this the guileless one? This wild youth who slays the fair swan—who knows not his own name nor whence he comes, nor whither he goes, nor what are his destinies? The old knight eyes him curiously—he will put him to the test. This youth had seen the king pass once—he had marked his pain. Was he "enlightened by pity"? Is he the appointed deliverer? The old knight now invites him to the shrine of the Grail. "What is the Grail?" asks the[Pg 29] youth. Truly a guileless, innocent one! yet a brave and pure knight, since he has known no evil, and so readily repents of a fault committed in ignorance.

Gurnemanz is strangely drawn to him. He shall see the Grail, and in the Holy Palace, what time the mystic light streams forth and the assembled knights bow themselves in prayer, the voice which comforted Amfortas shall speak to his deliverer and bid him arise and heal the king.

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Gurnemanz and Parsifal have ceased to speak. They stand in the glowing light of the summer-land. The tide of music rolls on continuously, but sounds more strange and dreamy.[Pg 30]

Is it a cloud passing over the sky? There seems to be a shuddering in the branches—the light fades upon yonder sunny woodlands—the foreground darkens apace. The whole scene is moving, but so slowly that it seems to change like a dissolving view. I see the two figures of Gurnemanz and Parsifal moving through the trees—they are lost behind yonder rock. They emerge farther off—higher up. The air grows very dim; the orchestra peals louder and louder. I lose the two in the deepening twilight. The forest is changing, the land is wild and mountainous. Huge galleries and arcades, rock-hewn, loom through the dim forest; but all is growing dark. I listen to the murmurs of the "Grail," the "Spear," the "Pain," the "Love[Pg 31] and Faith" motives—hollow murmurs, confused, floating out of the depths of lonely caves. Then I have a feeling of void and darkness, and there comes a sighing as of a soul swooning away in a trance, and a vision of waste places and wild caverns; and then through the confused dream I hear the solemn boom of mighty bells, only muffled. They keep time as to some ghastly march. I strain my eyes into the thick gloom before me. Is it a rock, or forest, or palace?

As the light returns slowly, a hall of more than Alhambralike splendor opens before me. My eyes are riveted on the shining pillars of variegated marble, the tessellated pavements, the vaulted roof glowing with gold and color; beyond, arcades of agate columns, bathed in a[Pg 33][Pg 32] misty moonlight air, and lost in a bewildering perspective of halls and corridors.



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### PARSIFAL AND GURNEMANZ PASSING THROUGH THE RAVINE

I hear the falling of distant water in marble fountains; the large bells of Montsalvat peal louder and louder, and to music of unimaginable stateliness the knights, clad in the blue and red robes of the Grail, enter in solemn procession, and take their seats at two semicircular tables which start like arms to the right and left of the holy shrine. Beneath it lies Titirel entranced, and upon it is presently deposited the sacred treasure of the Grail itself.

As the wounded King Amfortas is borne in, the assembled knights, each standing in his place, a golden cup before him, intone the Grail motive, which is [Pg 34] taken up by the entering choruses of servitors and esquires bearing the holy relics.

Gurnemanz is seated among knights; Parsifal stands aside and looks on in mute astonishment, "a guileless one."

As the Holy Grail is set down on the altar before the wounded king, a burst of heavenly music streams from the high dome—voices of angels intone the celestial phrases, "*Take, eat*" and "*This is my blood!*" and blend them with the "faith and love" motives. As the choruses die away, the voice of the entranced Titirel is heard from beneath the altar calling upon Amfortas, his son, to uncover the Grail, that he may find refreshment and life in the blessed vision.

Then follows a terrible struggle in the [Pg 35] breast of Amfortas. *He*, sore stricken in sin, yet Guardian of the Grail, guilty among the guiltless, oppressed with pain, bowed down with shame, craving for restoration, overwhelmed with unworthiness, yet chosen to stand and minister before the Lord on behalf of His saints! Pathetic situation, which must in all times repeat itself in the history of the Church. The unworthiness of the minister affects not the validity of his consecrated acts. Yet what agony of mind must many a priest have suffered, himself oppressed with sin and doubt, while dispensing the means of grace, and acting as a minister and steward of the mysteries!

The marvelous piece of self-analysis in which the conscience-stricken king bewails his lot as little admits of description [Pg 36] here as the music which embodies his emotion.

At the close of it angel voices seem floating in midair, sighing the mystic words:

"Durch Mitleid wissend  
Der reine Thor,  
Harre sein  
Den ich erkor."  
[Wait for my chosen one,  
Guileless and innocent,  
Pity-enlightened.]

And immediately afterward the voice of Titirel, like one turning restlessly in his sleep, comes up from his living tomb beneath the altar: "*Uncover the Grail!*"

With trembling hands the sick king raises himself, and with a great effort staggers toward the shrine—the covering [Pg 37] is removed—he takes the crystal cup—he raises it on high—the blood is dark—the light begins to fade in the hall—a mist and dimness come over the scene—we seem to be assisting at a shadowy ceremony in a dream—the big bells are tolling—the heavenly choirs from above the dome, which is now bathed in twilight, are heard: "*Drink ye all of this!*" Amfortas raises on high the crystal vase—the knights fall on their knees in prayer. Suddenly a faint tremor of light quivers in the crystal cup—then the blood grows ruby red for a moment. Amfortas waves it to and fro—the knights gaze in ecstatic adoration. Titirel's voice gathers strength in his tomb:

"Celestial rapture:  
How streams the light upon the face of God!"

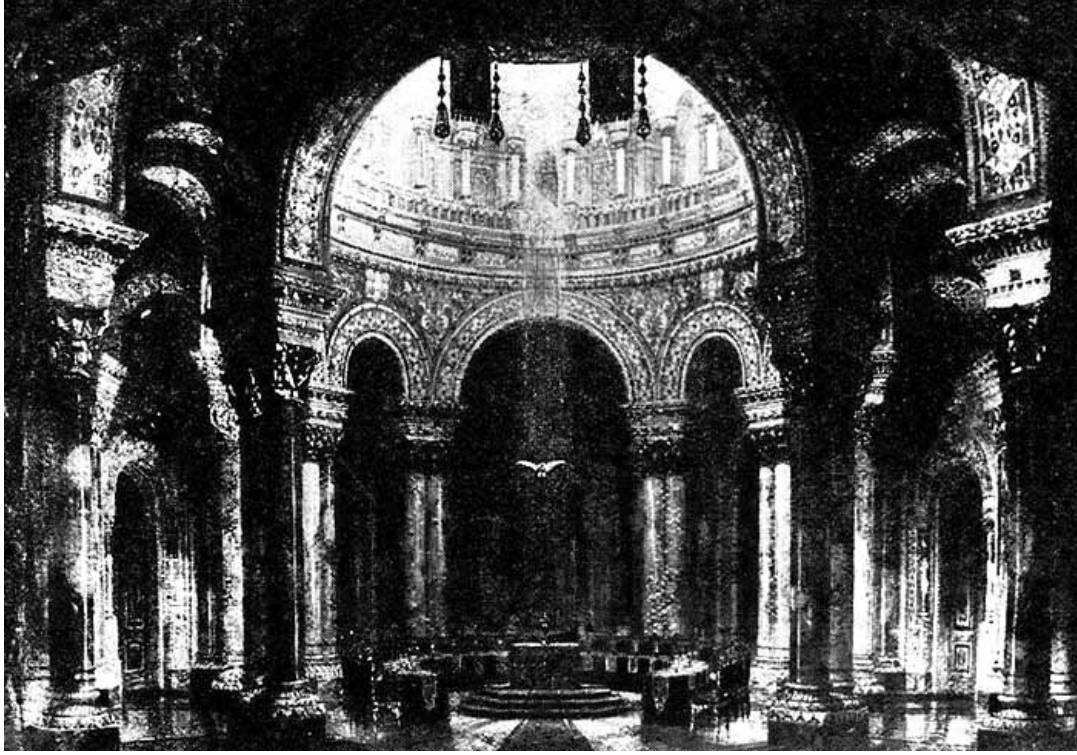
The light fades slowly out of the crystal cup—the miracle is accomplished. The blood again grows dark—the light of common day returns to the halls of Montsalvat, and the knights resume their seats, to find each one his golden goblet filled with wine.

During the sacred repast which follows, the brotherhood join hands and embrace, singing:

"Blessed are they that believe;  
Blessed are they that love!"

and the refrain is heard again far up in the heights, reechoed by the angelic hosts.[Pg 38]

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#### THE GREAT HALL OF THE HOLY GRAIL

I looked round upon the silent audience while these astonishing scenes were passing before me; the whole assembly was[Pg 40][Pg 39] motionless—all seemed to be awed by the august spectacle—seemed almost to share in the devout contemplation and trancelike worship of the holy knights. Every thought of the stage had vanished—nothing was further from my own thoughts than play-acting. I was sitting as I should sit at an oratorio, in devout and rapt contemplation. Before my eyes had passed a symbolic vision of prayer and ecstasy, flooding the soul with overpowering thoughts of the divine sacrifice and the mystery of unfathomable love.

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The hall of Montsalvat empties. Gurnemanz strides excitedly up to Parsifal, who stands stupefied with what he has seen

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"Why standest thou silent?  
Knowest thou what thine eyes have seen?"  
[Pg 41]

The "guileless one" shakes his head. "Nothing but a fool!" exclaims Gurnemanz, angrily; and, seizing Parsifal by the shoulder, he pushes him roughly out of the hall, with:

"Be off! look after thy geese,  
And henceforth leave our swans in peace."

The Grail vision had, then, taught the "guileless one" nothing. He could not see his mission—he was as yet unawakened to the deeper life of the spirit; tho blameless and unsullied, he was still the "natural man." Profound truth! that was not first which was spiritual, but that which was natural; before Parsifal wins a spiritual triumph, he must be spiritually tried; his inner life must be deepened and[Pg 42] developed, else he can never read aright the messege of the Grail.

The life of God in the spirit comes only when the battle for God in the heart has been fought and won.

Fare forth, thou guileless one! thou shalt yet add to the simplicity of the dove the wisdom of the serpent. Thou art innocent because ignorant; but thou shalt be weighed anon in the balance and not be found wanting; and then shalt thou reconquer the holy spear lost in Sin, rewon in Purity and Sacrifice, and be to the frail Amfortas the chosen savior for whom he waits.

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The foregoing events occupied about an hour and a quarter. When the curtain fell the vast audience broke up in silence. [Pg 43]

The air outside was cool and balmy. In the distance lay the city of Bayreuth, with the tower of the Alte Schloss and the old church standing up gray against the distant Bavarian hills. All around us lay the pine woods, broken by the lawns and avenues that encircle the theater and embower it in a secluded world of its own—even as the Palace of the Grail was shut off from the profane world. Here, indeed, is truly the Montsalvat of the modern drama—a spot purified and sacred to the highest aims and noblest manifestations of Art.

In about an hour the Spear motive was the signal blown on the wind instruments outside, and I took my seat for the second act. [Pg 44]

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## Act II

A restless, passion-tossed prelude. The "Grail" subject distorted, the "Spear" motive thrust in discordant, the "Faith and Love" theme fluttering like a wounded dove in pain, fierce bursts of passion, wild shocks of uncontrolled misery, mingling with the "carnal joy" music of Klingsor's magic garden and the shuddering might of his alchemy.

The great magician, Klingsor, is seen alone in his dungeon palace—harsh contrast to the gorgeous halls of Montsalvat. Here all is built of the live rock, an impenetrable fastness, the home of devilish might and terrible spells.

Klingsor is aware of the coming struggle, and he means to be ready for it. He owns the sacred spear wrested from Amfortis; he even aspires to win the Grail; he knows the "guileless one" is on his way to wrest that spear from him. His only hope is in paralyzing the fool by his enchantments as he paralyzed Amfortis, and the same woman will serve his turn.

"Kundry!" The time is come, the spells are woven—blue vapors rise, and in the midst of the blue vapors the figure of the still sleeping Kundry is seen. She wakes, trembling violently; she knows she is again under the spell she abhors—the spell to do evil, the mission to corrupt. With a shuddering scream she stands before her tormentor, denying his power, loathing to return to her vile mission, yet returning, as with a bitter cry she vanishes from his presence.

Parsifal has invaded Klingsor's realm; the evil knights have fled before his prowess, wounded and in disorder. Kundry is commissioned to meet the guileless youth in the enchanted garden, and, all other allurements failing, to subdue him by her irresistible fascinations and hand him over to Klingsor.

In a moment the scenery lifts, and a garden of marvelous beauty and extent lies before us. The flowers are all of colossal dimensions—huge roses hang in tangled festoons, the cactus, the lily, the blue-bell, creepers, and orchids of enormous size and dazzling color wave in midair, and climb the aromatic trees.

On a bright hill appears Parsifal, standing bewildered by the light and loveliness around him. Beautiful girls dressed like flowers, and hardly distinguishable from them at first, rush in, bewailing their wounded and disabled knights, but, on seeing Parsifal, fall upon their new prey, and, surrounding him, sing verse after verse of the loveliest ballet music, while trying to embrace him, and quarreling with each other for the privilege.

About that wonderful chorus of flower-girls there was just a suggestive touch of the Rhine maidens' singing. It belonged to the same school of thought and feeling, but was freer, wilder—more considerable, and altogether more complex and wonderful in its changes and in the marvelous confusion in which it breaks up.

The "guileless one" resists these charmers, and they are just about to leave him in disgust, when the roses lift on one side, and, stretched on a mossy bank overhung with flowers, appears a woman of unearthly loveliness. It is Kundry transformed, and in the marvelous duet which follows between her and Parsifal, a perfectly new and original type of love duet is struck out—an analysis of character, unique in musical drama—a combination of sentiment and a situation absolutely novel, which could only have been conceived and carried out by a creative genius of the highest order. [Pg 49]

First, I note that the once spellbound Kundry is devoted utterly to her task of winning Parsifal. Into this she throws all the intensity of her wild and desperate nature; but in turn she is strangely affected by the spiritual atmosphere of the "guileless one"—a feeling comes over her, in the midst of her witchcraft passion, that he is in some way to be her savior too; yet, womanlike, she conceives of her salvation as possible only in union with him. Yet was this the very crime to which Klingsor would drive her for the ruin of Parsifal. Strange confusion of thought, feeling, aspiration, longing—struggle of irreconcilable elements! How shall she reconcile them? Her intuition fails her not, and her tact triumphs. She will win by stealing his love through his mother's love. A mother's love is holy; that love she tells him of. It can never more be his; but she will replace it, her passion shall be sanctified by it; through *that* passion she has sinned, through it she, too, shall be redeemed. She will work out her own salvation by the very spells that are upon her for evil. He is pure—he shall make her pure, can she but win him; both, by the might of such pure love, will surely be delivered from Klingsor, the corrupter, the tormentor. Fatuous dream! How, through corruption, win incorruption? How, through indulgence, win peace and freedom from desire? It is the old cheat of the senses—Satan appears as an angel of light. The thought deludes the unhappy Kundry herself; she is no longer consciously working for Klingsor; she really believes that this new turn, this bias given to passion, will purify both her and the guileless, pure fool she seeks to



subdue.

Nothing can describe the subtlety of their long interview, the surprising turns of sentiment and contrasts of feeling. Throughout this scene Parsifal's instinct is absolutely true and sure. Everything Kundry says about his mother, Herzeleide, he feels; but every attempt to make him accept her instead he resists. Her desperate declamation is splendid. Her heartrending sense of misery and piteous prayer for salvation, her belief that before her is her savior could she but win him to her will, the choking fury of baffled passion, the steady and subtle [Pg 52] encroachments made while Parsifal is lost in a meditative dream, the burning kiss which recalls him to himself, the fine touch by which this kiss, while arousing in him the stormiest feelings, causes a sharp pain, as of Amfortas's own wound, piercing his very heart—all this is realistic, if you will, but it is realism raised to the sublime.

Suddenly Parsifal springs up, hurls the enchantress from him, will forth from Klingsor's realm. She is baffled—she knows it; for a moment she bars his passage, then succumbs; the might of sensuality which lost Amfortas the sacred spear has been met and defeated by the guileless fool. He has passed from innocence to knowledge in his interview with the flower-girt girls, in his long converse [Pg 53] with Kundry, in her insidious embrace, in her kiss; but all these are now thrust aside; he steps forth still unconquered, still "guileless," but no more "a fool." The knowledge of good and evil has come, but the struggle is already passed.

"Yes, sinner, I do offer thee Redemption," he can say to Kundry; "not in thy way, but in thy Lord Christ's way of sacrifice!"

But the desperate creature, wild with passion, will listen to no reason; she shouts aloud to her master, and Klingsor suddenly appears, poisoning the sacred spear. In another moment he hurls it right across the enchanted garden at Parsifal. It can not wound the guileless and pure one as it wounded the sinful Amfortas. A miracle! It hangs ar [Pg 54] rested in air above Parsifal's head; he seizes it—it is the sacred talisman, one touch of which will heal even as it inflicted the king's deadly wound.

With a mighty cry and the shock as of an earthquake, the castle of Klingsor falls shattered to pieces, the garden withers up to a desert, the girls, who have rushed in, lie about among the fading flowers, themselves withered up and dead. Kundry sinks down in a deathly swoon, while Parsifal steps over a ruined wall and disappears, saluting her with the words: "Thou alone knowest when we shall meet again!"

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The long shadows were stealing over the hills when I came out at the second pause. Those whom I met and con [Pg 55] versed with were subdued and awed. What a solemn tragedy of human passion we had been assisting at! Not a heart there but could interpret that struggle between the flesh and the spirit from its own experiences. Not one but knew the desperately wicked and deceitful temptations that come like enchantresses in the wizard's garden, to plead the cause of the devil in the language of high-flown sentiment or even religious feeling.

Praise and criticism seemed dumb; we rather walked and spoke of what we had just witnessed like men convinced of judgment, and righteousness, and sin. It was a strange mood in which to come out of a theater after witnessing what would commonly be called an "Opera." I felt more than ever the impossibility of pro [Pg 56] ducing the *Parsifal* in London, at Drury Lane or Covent Garden, before a well-dressed company of loungers, who had well dined, and were on their way to balls and suppers afterward.

I would as soon see the Oberammergau play at a music-hall.

No; in *Parsifal* all is solemn, or all is irreverent. At Bayreuth we came on a pilgrimage; it cost us time, and trouble, and money; we were in earnest—so were the actors; the spirit of the great master who had planned every detail seemed still to preside over all; the actors lived in their parts; not a thought of self remained; no one accepted applause or recall; no one aimed at producing a personal effect; the actors were lost in the drama, and it was the drama and not the [Pg 57] actors which has impressed and solemnized us. When I came out they asked me who was Amfortas? I did not know. I said "the wounded king."

As the instruments played out the Faith and Love motive for us to reenter, the mellow sunshine broke once more from the cloud-rack over city, and field, and forest, before sinking behind the long low range of the distant hills. [Pg 58]

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## Act III

The opening prelude of the third and last act seems to warn me of the lapse of time. The music is full of pain and restlessness—the pain of wretched years of long waiting for a deliverer, who comes not; the restlessness and misery of a hope deferred, the weariness of life without a single joy. The motives, discolored as it were by grief, work up to a distorted version of the Grail subject, which breaks off as with a cry of despair.

Is the Grail, too, then turned into a [Pg 59] mocking spirit to the unhappy Amfortas?

Relief comes to us with the lovely scene upon which the curtain rises. Again the wide summer-land lies stretching away over sunlit moor and woodland. In the foreground wave the forest trees, and I hear the ripple of the woodland streams. Invariably throughout the drama, in the midst of all human pain and passion, great Nature is there, peaceful, harmonious in all her loveliest moods, a paradise in which dwell souls who make of her their own purgatory.

In yonder aged figure, clad in the Grail pilgrim robe, I discern Gurnemanz; his hair is white; he stoops with years; a rude hut is hard by. Presently a groan arrests his attention, moaning as of a [Pg 60] human thing in distress. He clears away some brushwood, and beneath it finds, waking from her long trance, the strange figure of Kundry. For how many years she has slept we know not. Why is she now recalled to life? She staggers to her feet; we see that she too is in a

pilgrim garb, with a rope girding her dress of coarse brown serge. "Service! service!" she mutters, and, seizing a pitcher, moves mechanically to fill it at the well, then totters but half awake into the wooden hut. The forest music breaks forth—the hum of happy insect life, the song of wild birds. All seems to pass as in a vision, when suddenly enters a knight clad in black armor from top to toe.

The two eye him curiously, and Gurnemanz, approaching, bids him lay aside his armor and his weapons. He carries a long spear. In silence the knight un-helms, and, sticking the spear into the ground, kneels before it, and remains lost in devotional contemplation. The "Spear" and "Grail" motives mingle together in the full tide of orchestral sounds carrying on the emotional undercurrent of the drama. The knight is soon recognized by both as the long-lost and discarded Parsifal.

The "guileless one" has learned wisdom, and discovered his mission—he knows now that he bears the spear which is to heal the king's grievous wound, and that he himself is appointed his successor. Through long strife and trial and pain he seems to have grown into something of Christ's own likeness. Not all at once, but at last he has found the path. He returns to bear salvation and pardon both to Kundry and the wretched king, Amfortas.

The full music flows on while Gurnemanz relates how the knights have all grown weak and aged, deprived of the vision and sustenance of the Holy Grail, while the long-entranced Titirel is at last dead.

At this news Parsifal, overcome with grief, swoons away, and Gurnemanz and Kundry loosen his armor, and sprinkle him with water from the holy spring. Underneath his black suit of mail he appears clad in a long white tunic.

The grouping here is admirable. Gurnemanz is in the Templar's red and blue robe. Parsifal in white, his auburn hair parted in front and flowing down in ringlets on either side, recalls Leonardo's favorite conception of the Savior's head, and, indeed, from this point Parsifal becomes a kind of symbolic reflection of the Lord Himself. Kundry, subdued and awed, lies weeping at his feet; he lifts his hands to bless her with infinite pity. She washes his feet, and dries them with the hairs of her head. It is a bold stroke, but the voices of nature, the murmur of the summer woods, come with an infinite healing tenderness and pity, and the act is seen to be symbolical of the pure devotion of a sinful creature redeemed from sin. Peace has at last entered into that wild and troubled heart, and restless Kundry, delivered from Klingsor's spell, receives the sprinkling of baptismal water at the hands of Parsifal.

The great spaces of silence in the dialog, broken now by a few sentences from Parsifal, now from Gurnemanz, are more eloquent than many words. The tidal music flows on in a ceaseless stream of changing harmonies, returning constantly to the sweet and slumbrous sound of a summer-land, full of teeming life and glowing happiness.

Then Gurnemanz takes up his parable. It is the Blessed Good Friday on which our dear Lord suffered. The Love and Faith phrases are chimed forth, the pain-notes of the Cross agony are sounded and pass, the Grail motive seems to swoon away in descending harmonies, sinking into the woodland voices of universal Nature—that trespass-pardoned Nature that now seems waking to the day of her glory and innocence.

In that solemn moment Parsifal bends over the subdued and humbled Kundry, and kisses her softly on the brow—*her* wild kiss in the garden had kindled in him fierce fire, mingled with the bitter wound-pain; *his* is the seal of her eternal pardon and peace.

In the distance the great bells of Montsalvat are now heard booming solemnly—the air darkens, the light fades out, the slow motion of all the scenery recommences. Again I hear the wild cave music, strange and hollow sounding—the three move on as in a dream, and are soon lost in the deep shadows; and through all, louder and louder, boom the heavy bells of Montsalvat, until the stage brightens, and we find ourselves once more in the vast Alhambra-like hall of the knights.



## PARSIFAL ENTERING THE GRAIL CASTLE IN TRIUMPH

For the last time Amfortas is borne in, and the brotherhood of the Grail form the possession bearing the sacred relics, which are deposited before him.

The king, in great agony and despair, bewails the death of his father and his own backsliding. With failing but desperate energy he harangues the assembled knights, and, tottering forward, beseeches them to free him from his misery and sin-stained life, and thrust their swords deep into his wounded side. At this moment Gurnemanz, accompanied by Parsifal and Kundry, enter. Parsifal steps forward[Pg 68] with the sacred spear, now at length to be restored to the knights. He touches the side of Amfortas, the wound is healed, and as he raises the spear on high the point is seen glowing with the crimson glory of the Grail. Then stepping up to the shrine, Parsifal takes the crystal cup, the dark blood glows bright crimson as he holds it on high, and at that moment, while all fall on their knees, and celestial music ("Drink ye all of this") floats in the upper air, Kundry falls back dying, her eyes fixed on the blessed Grail. A white dove descends and hovers for a moment, poised in mid-air above the glowing cup. A soft chorus of angels seems to die away in the clouds beyond the golden dome—

"Marvelous mercy!  
Victorious Savior!"  
[Pg 69]

Words can add nothing to the completeness of the drama, and no words can give any idea of the splendor and complexity of that sound ocean upon which the drama floats from beginning to end.

The enemies of the Grail are destroyed or subdued, the wound they have inflicted is healed, the prey they claimed is rescued; the pure and blameless Parsifal becomes the consecrated head of the holy brotherhood, and the beatific vision of God's eternal love and Real Presence is restored to the knights of the Sangrail.

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When I came out of the theater, at the end of the third and last act, it was ten o'clock.

The wind was stirring in the fir-trees, the stars gleamed out fitfully through a[Pg 70] sky, across which the clouds were hurrying wildly, but the moon rose low and large beyond the shadowy hills, and bathed the misty valleys with a mild and golden radiance as of some celestial dawn.[Pg 71]

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## When the Curtain Fell

When the curtain fell on the last performance of *Parsifal*, at Bayreuth, which, on the 30th of July, 1883, brought the celebration month to a close, the enthusiasm of the audience found full vent in applause. The curtain was once lifted, but no calls would induce the performers to appear a second time or receive any individual homage. This is entirely in accordance with the tone of these exceptional representations. On each occasion the only applause permitted was at the end of the drama, and throughout not a single actor[Pg 72] answered to a call or received any personal tribute.

Behind the scenes occurred a touching incident. The banker Gross led Wagner's children up to the assembled actors, and in the name of their dead father thanked the assembly for the care and labor of love expended by each and all in producing the last work of the great dead master. Siegfried, Wagner's son, thirteen years old, then, in a few simple words, stifled with sobs, thanked the actors personally, and all the children shook hands with them. The King of Bavaria charged himself upon Wagner's death with the education of his son.[Pg 73]

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