

**PARSIFAL: A
FESTIVAL MUSIC-
DRAMA. PP. 1-20**

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Parsifal: A Festival Music-drama. pp. 1-20 by John P. Jackson & Richard Wagner

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JOHN P. JACKSON & RICHARD WAGNER

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A
FESTIVAL MUSIC-DRAMA

— BY —

Richard Wagner.



THE ENGLISH VERSION

BY

JOHN P. JACKSON.

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THE CASTLE AND CHURCH OF THE GRAIL.

From a Sketch by FRANK KENNAN.

The Story of the Grail.

*O Graiburg Turrets, Wisdom'd un beholden,
Which common mortals' footsteps never near;
Who, trusting, told ye of their woes untolden,
See Past and Future, Fate and Folly clear.*

*Crown'd forest giants, 'neath broad frondage resting,
Here reign supreme in solitude sublime:*

*The Warders at the portals waiting, questing,
And deeply troubled, watch the course of time.*

*The em'rald Chalice, consecrate, is gleaming,
In which fell from the Cross the Sacred Blood;
Its hallow'd light, in wondrous glory beaming,
Piercing the walls, with radiance steeps the flood.*

*Who gazes on its glow, is healed, believing,
Though bore he pain and sorrow e'er so great;
Amfortas sorely wounded lies, eye grieving;—
Whence comes He who shall rule his high estate?*

*O Wounds that bleed, and must bleed on forever!
O Yearning's never-ending woe and wail!
'Tis magic snares the goodly Knights' endeavor,—
Who gives us aid? Who then shall guard the Grail?*

*Where comes such courage high from mortal lowly?
Whose sword and heart are pure as light of day?
The morning flies—the evening hours pass slowly—
And yet no Rescuer comes upon the way!*

*When from the rocky clefts in countless number,
The brooded basilisks come forth by night;
And in the sacred Radiance basking, slumber,
Who holds his shield before the Sacred Light?*

*When on the Grail breathes venom'd salamander,
With poison-reeking breath; when from the wave
Weird nixies rise, with serpent-greedy pander,—
Who'll poise his steel the Sanctity to save?*

*Why trouble ye, O Watchers?—Can ye summon
From valley or from wild waves whom ye would?
A Child is he, in guardianship of Woman,
Whom ye await, the Hero, Pure and Good.*

*He who shall save you: o'er you rule in splendor,
Is still held fast in ban of forest night;
He who your bonds shall break; be your defender,
Must first be laugh'd at ere he bring the Light.*

Hermann von Lingg.

PARSIFAL is the last of Richard Wagner's music-dramas. It is his swan song. In it he no longer chants the glories of the redemption of Humanity through the intercession and ennobling influence of Woman. The giant brain that had throbb'd in poetry and music the intensity of passionate human striving; that had rescued the unhappy Dutchman from eternal doom through the devotion of Senta; that had rescued Tannhäuser from the magic of Venusberg, through the pleading of the saintly Elizabeth; that had given death in bliss to Tristan and Isolde, and had left the supreme legacy of Love to the world through Brunnhilda, found a yet higher theme.

It is a beautiful world that we have to leave, wherein Wagner had taught us to search in femininity for the halo of divinity. To its rudeness he had preached loveliness and beauty, and bliss and blessing. Its striving he had made godlike in transforming Woman into an angel of redemption, the source of adventure and inspiration and the reward of complete joy. But the storm and stress period has now departed. The charming quest of adventure exemplified in Young Siegfried is finished. The all-consuming passion of the Knight of Careol and dark eyed Erin's Princess has found solution in death. Even Brunnhilda's splendid legacy no longer suffices.

But the end was coming. The blaze of Walhalla was symbolical of the dawn of Christianity. With his last years, when the all-devouring storm was over, when the fervor of manhood had merged with the serene splendor of age, the Poet-Composer turned to the realm of pure Faith, to the attainment of the glory of the Grail, that marvelous medieval symbolism in which is held the belief of millions of humanity of all creeds and all nationalities.

PARSIFAL is intimately connected with the Poet-Composer's earlier work LOHENGRIN. In fact the study of one is a necessity to the understanding of the other—for LOHENGRIN is PARSIFAL'S son. Echoes of the beautiful overture of the earlier work, that tells of the bringing of the Grail to earth by an angelic host; and of the narrative description of fabled Monsalvat, are heard everywhere in PARSIFAL. What in LOHENGRIN was pictured as the unattainable is in the later work achieved through purity and faith. The Grail is one of

the most beautiful poetic conceptions of the Middle Ages. The legend of it has its roots in the oldest times. The idea lies at its basis that somewhere in the world there existed a place of the purest bliss, where eternal peace reigned, where all wishes and hopes found solution. But during the darkness and days of discontent and doubt, the picture of this paradise was lost, and only a single jewel remained in memory—a precious stone which, imbued with all the strength of the lost good, afforded its possessor all blessing and bliss.

The early Christian teachers transformed the old legend to a precious jewel gifted with the virtues of healing and redemption, and which they styled the *San Greal* or *Holy Grail*. It was the embodiment so to speak, of all that the poets of that era of devotion could express of the sacred in the Christian religion, of the highest and purest attainable by mankind. It was the miraculous chalice of wonderful power, from which, the legends say, Christ drank at the Last Supper, and in which were caught and preserved by Joseph of Arimathea the last drops of the Saviour's blood as He was taken down from the Cross; and which afterwards became that "treasure brought from heaven by angels and guarded by a company of knights in the temple-castle of inaccessible Monsalvat—unapproachable by the profane foot, unattainable to the ordinary eye."

In German mythology Wagner found the inspiration for all his dramatic poems, and from the poetry was evolved their musical completion. The story of *PARSIFAL* was originally told by the German Minnesinger, Wolfram von Eschenbach, in that peculiar contest of singers before Landgrave Hermann, at the Wartburg, about the year 1207. The story of the *Wartburger Krieg* is contained in the epic poems of *PARSIFAL*, *TITUREL* and *LOHENGREN*, the first of which is alone from Wolfram, while the second is supposed to be by Albrecht of Scharffenberg, and the third is from a poet of the Lower Rhine, whose name is not known. Wolfram's poem comprises some of the most beautiful medieval legends in its plan. The traditions of King Arthur and the Round Table, and of the Grail, are by the Minnesinger (following Chrétien de Troyes), blended into a beautiful mystical whole. The splendor of worldly chivalry, as represented by King Arthur, is transformed into the glory of a kingdom of spiritual knighthood, representing the highest and purest chivalric ideals of medieval poets.

The original form of the legend, as given by Wolfram, is undoubtedly the Arthurian, which was treated by the Welsh bards as early as

the sixth and seventh centuries. In 1170 Chrétien de Troyes sang of the search of the Holy Grail. With him an ideal structure rises from the legendary foundation of the Welsh *Mabinogion*. Parsifal is Peredur ennobled under the influence of Christianity. Then the legend was adopted by Wolfram. The poets of the Middle Ages endeavored in every possible way to describe in the most glowing colors the homes of their heroes; they gathered poetic and legendary flowers wherewith to crown them; and they placed them at last with the knightly throng of Templars, whom they transferred to Monsalvat. They created a new Zion, and the Grail was the symbol almost of divinity.

Titurel was the first ruler of the kingdom of the Grail which is placed by Wagner in inaccessible mountainous regions of Gothic Spain. There he "built a shrine for the Holy Things" that had been placed in his hands by angels—the Chalice or the "Grail" and the Sacred Lance with which Longinus had pierced the body of Christ. The castle was built upon a rock inaccessible to ordinary mortals, and was called *Monsalvat*, the hill of salvation. There Titurel gathered together the Templar defenders of the *San Greal*. In the center of the castle there was a wonderful temple of fabulous glories. It was circular in form, and had seventy-two chapels or choirs, with thirty-six turrets. The vaulted roofs of the choirs were of blue sapphire and in the center was a sheet of costly emeralds with the Lamb and Cross emblazoned in gold. All the altar pieces were likewise of sapphire, emblematic of the atonement of sin, while rare and costly gems were everywhere scattered profusely around.

In the center of the principal dome of this superb temple, were the sun and the moon, the one in sparkling diamonds, the other in topazes. The windows were of crystal, beryls, and other precious stones, on which were painted, in the most exquisite colors, designs of rarest beauty. The turrets were of gold, the summit of the central dome was formed by a single carbuncle, which shone amid the darkness of the night, to light the way for the weary pilgrim. In the center of the principal dome stood another temple, in miniature, still more brilliant and beautiful; and in this the Holy Grail itself was deposited. Every Friday a white dove brought down the Host from heaven and placed it in the holy vessel. To be its guardian was the highest honor to which mankind could aspire, and could only be obtained by the pure in heart and head, by the noblest and loftiest natures, wise and brave, sober and temperate, chaste

and gentle, devoted to the service of God and the protection of the helpless and oppressed. Around this magic temple lay a wood where none could penetrate save the pure in heart and deed. Centuries passed on and still the temple stood in its pristine splendor, watched and defended by its faithful guardians till, at length, the increasing wickedness of the western world rendering it unworthy of so sacred a deposit, it was borne back by angels to some unknown region in the East.

Titirel ruled four hundred years over the Grail kingdom ere he was called to his eternal rest. He was succeeded by his son Frimutelle, who, however, fell from grace. He, in his turn, was succeeded by Amfortas, who had fallen from his high estate and had been wounded in an encounter with the magician Klingsor. The latter had himself once been a Knight of the Grail, but he had been expelled from the order for his sins. He had then built a castle near Monsalvat and had filled it with beautiful maidens to allure the Knights. Amfortas had fallen to the wiles of Kundry (Orgeleuse). Klingsor had obtained possession of the Sacred Spear, and hoped in time to possess himself of the Grail. Amfortas, however, was still kept in life by being permitted to look upon the radiance of the Grail. But his wound would not heal; yet the prophecy was that there should come to the Grailburg in good time a pure, youthful knight, who after passing triumphantly through temptation and mockery, should bring him healing and redemption by touching his wound with the Sacred Lance, but should succeed him as ruler of the Grail realm.

Parsifal, a descendant of Titirel, the son of Gamuret and Herzeleide, is the pure knight who is chosen for the work of redemption. He is called the "guileless fool," which Wagner derives from the Arabic *fal-parisi*. He is the *Peredur* of the *Mabinogion*, the *Parcival* of *Gallois* of *Chrétien de Troyes* and the *Parzival* of *Wolfram*.—His adventures are recorded by Wagner in his poem in sufficient measure to give the student of the music-drama the full appreciation of his mission. The composer takes his hero out of the circle of the Arthurian legends, keeps him in absolute knightly purity, unlike either *Chrétien* or *Wolfram*; making of him a *Siegfried* ennobled, whose striving is for the attainment of godliness, through conflicts with temptation and evil, until he can stand in the presence of the most glorious symbol of Faith:—

*"The phantom of a Cup that comes and goes—
The Cup, the Cup itself, from which Our Lord
Drank at the last sad supper with his own."*

The poem of *PARSIFAL* was completed by Wagner in the summer of 1877, a year after the first *Nibelung Festival Performances* at *Bayreuth*. On the 16th of September of that year, he read it before the delegates from the numerous *Wagner Societies* that had then been established all over Germany. "Reverently we sat that afternoon" says *Prof. Tappert*, "in *Villa Wahnfried*. It was an hour that can never be forgotten. When the Master came to the third act, just to the place where the coffin with *Titirel's* corpse is borne into the hall by the *Knights of the Grail*, the sun was sinking behind the trees in the *Hof Garden*. His last beams, tremblingly, like greeting spirits, came silently into the room and glorified the scene, the waves of light finally resting like a halo around the head of the composer." Wagner finished the musical composition of the work at *Palermo*, and in July and August 1882, sixteen performances of the work were given at *Bayreuth*. On February 13, of the following year the great composer died at *Venice*.

But the germ of the *Parsifal* music-drama was born in Wagner's mind much earlier than 1877. The first portions were the "Abendmahl" scene and the "Good Friday Magic." The latter is thought to date from the year 1857. *Prof. Tappert* says: "Wagner told me (in 1877) that in the fifties when in *Zurich* he took possession on a Good Friday of a charming new house, and that inspired by the beautiful spring weather he wrote out the sketch that very day of the Good Friday music. From a letter of his to *Tichatschek* dated *Zurich*, February 9, 1857, I believe I am justified in coming to the conclusion that 1857 is the date to be adopted. The passage in his letter reads: 'At Easter I shall take possession of a very charming little villa near *Zurich*, with a pretty garden, in a glorious position, just like I have so long desired. There I shall soon get settled and begin work in earnest'."

In his dramatic sketch of *JESUS OF NAZARETH*, Wagner says: Love is the law of life for all created things. But man interfered in the divine law; he made restrictions in order to attain an end outside of human nature—that is, to gain power, rulership and for the protection of property. The greatest glory of love is in creation, then in doing good to others, then in death, that is, the self-sacrifice in favor of the maintenance and enrichment of the whole life, which leaves its legacy of traditions and personality on earth and lives again in the ages to come. The loveless remain in egotism and find in death complete annihilation. Christ, he says, taught the beautiful