

A LETTER FROM GERMANY

Salzburg, September, 1920

THE German is now turned back upon himself. Cruel fate has left him nothing else. All of which he was proud, in which he revelled, of which he boasted, is gone. He sees himself quite alone with his own soul. Thus he can for once make the test what there really is in him. Therefore he flies to the elemental things in his heart, returns to his most secret inward possession of which no power on earth can rob him; and this is hidden in his music.

The German has always felt music to be his own art, his, as it were, by right, his ancestral property. It was also almost the only thing with which he was credited. German music remained undisputed by the other peoples; they were to make the history of the world, and the German was to provide the musical accompaniment. In his political ambition, in which he spent himself for fifty years, in the energy he used in thrusting out into the open world, in the commotion which he suddenly created, he was, in his own feeling, in the feeling of the best among the Germans, disloyal, as it were, to music. Inwardly he felt the confusion and disorder into which he fell during the last thirty years as a betrayal of German music. He is now conscious for the first time of the injustice which has been done to the three great masters since Wagner, Anton Bruckner, Hugo Wolf, and Gustav Mahler. Now that he at last returns from his preoccupation with quotidian things to the infinite, he becomes aware what these three great masters mean for him and how terribly in their lifetime they were undervalued, misunderstood, and unrecognised.

It may be said that in the world-war, under the terrible impression made by the Peace, in the violent impulse to self-examination the German first reached the point from which he now sees these three masters clearly for the first time. Seen from this point they present a very different appearance from that which they had in the dust of the conflicting opinions of the day. Three books give evidence of this: the biography of Bruckner by Ernst Decseys, who has already introduced himself very agreeably by a *Life of Hugo Wolf* (Schuster & Loeffler, Berlin); a very important essay on Hugo Wolf in Hermann Hefele's valuable *The Law of Form* (Diederich, Tend); and lastly an exposition of Mahler himself (Hans Carl, Nürnberg), youthfully rich in syntheses, by a new author, Hans Ferdinand Redlich, whose father, Professor Josef Redlich, the last Finance Minister of the old Austria, who is also known in England by his books *English Local Government* and *The Law and Machinery of English Parliamentarism*. Different as are at bottom these three works, in their spiritual origins and intentions, the result of each is the same. They withdraw these three musicians from the opinions of their own time, bring them into the general perspective of musical history and teach us to see in them no longer a beginning, as they were considered during their lives, but rather the end of a mighty process of development in which, for hundreds of years, the son reverently received the holy word from the mouth of the father.

We who knew Bruckner, Wolf, and Mahler at first-hand, who breathed the dust of the struggle which was waged around them, who saw them bleeding from the wounds inflicted on them by hate and envy and the opposition of stupid inertia, we loved in them the bold moderns, and a new humanity seemed to be announced to us in their persons. For us they were the promise and pledge of something that was to come, the harbingers of a brighter, more beautiful, more human music. This gave them such a liberating power over us that in the middle of a weary epoch, busy with trivial arts and rotten with scepticisms, they made us believe again in the heroic, which

we, our faces turned youthfully forward to discern the future, thought imposed on us as our mission in life. Now we recognise that what then so exhilarated us in these works was not as we thought the clarion and the signal of the future, but the echo and farewell of the past. What sounded to us like the warrant of a new life was only the last sigh of a dying world. With these three masters one of the Germanies takes its leave, one which then already existed only in these three masters, the Southern Germany, the dreaming Germany, the Germany of the Bavarian stock, the Baroque Germany, which was called by the endearing name of Austria. The Germany of the old Holy Roman Empire, whose world-wide meaning was spread by the sword of Prince Eugene, the noble knight, as by the builder's hand of Fischer von Erlach and Hildebrand, and the baton of Glück—this truly Austrian Germany springs to life again in Anton Bruckner, smiling and rubbing away the sleep from her bright eyes, still quite unspoilt and again quite naïve, become a child again with a second innocence, with, so to speak, a *virginité refaite*.

But in Hugo Wolf it feels itself already present, already knows itself, but still will not surrender, will not lose itself. Rather its immense will to live struggles with a magnificent contempt for death against its better knowledge, its will to produce large and pure and strict form. (It is the great merit of Hermann Hefele that he recognises in Hugo Wolf this bright hard desire of form, the classical spirit without the "corruptulence of the romantic easiness," the determination of his "superior spirituality," the discipline which his form-loving soul applied to every conception, its close relationship to Greek and Italian art, the realm of Roman law and classical art.) In Mahler at last this Austrian-Bavarian Germany of the Baroque, warmed by the Latin, and moved by the Slav, spirit, looks at itself once again with a long, loving smile, transfigured by sorrow, wounded to death, but made wise by death. To die, says Novalis, is a very philosophical action. Mahler has set to music this philosophical action of Austria. For in the meanwhile Germany had long since abandoned her, had moved away ever more and more from Austria and Bavaria and the South towards what Fontane, himself a true Prussian, even though he had also Latin blood, liked to call the "Wendo-Germanic" direction. This "wanderer through the Mark" was for many years editor of the *Kreuzzeitung*, and even after he had given up the direction of this Junker paper had all his life a Junker cast of mind. He was one of the last *Alt-Berliner*, though, like almost all of the thorough-going *Berliner*, he was not born in Berlin. Yet in 1890 he began deeply to mistrust the development of Germany, which was generally considered to be a "Prussianisation"; and this may remind us that, though we speak rightly of Austrian, Bavarian, South, Catholic Germany, and to bring out its opposition to the Prussian, Northern, Protestant Germany, we must yet be careful not to make this distinction in too geographical a manner. The opposition is psychical and Psyche often works in curious ways. The most southern-spirited German remarkably often appears far in the north. The centenary of Fontane, who died in 1898, fell on December 30th, 1919. This gave an opportunity to the publisher, S. Fischer, in Berlin, to reissue his works and also to publish *Das Fontane-Buch*, in which the "classical old man," as Thomas Mann once called him, appears in a very lively fashion in his own *Confessions and Remarks upon Himself*.

But if he now so strongly affects his own people, he who all his life long was appreciated only by a few persons of fine taste, this is hardly caused by any merely outward occasion. It is precisely because we Germans are now spurning the Germany of William, and remember ourselves and the Germany of German music, and are determined to live again in our own spirit, that we seize with delight at this native of the Mark, who is a living proof that even a thorough Prussian can achieve the greatest charm, flexibility and diversity of spirit, the most delicate style and a truly European freedom in his attitude towards the world. He was indeed one of the best of Viennese, though

indeed a Viennese with the spirit of "old Fritz" for a background, a sober, reserved Viennese, and no other German poet of his time had in his spirit so much sun, so much of the South. He was a native of the Germany that was then silent, of which we Germans are now beginning to think again.

But we have also another guide to the old Germany, the essential Germany to which we now wish to return. Not only the three last masters of German music, not only the disciples of Goethe among our poets, such as Fontane, lead us thither. Another and a powerful guide has appeared to us during the war—Matthias Grünewald, the master of the Isenheim altar. As far back as 1675 Joachim von Sandrat's work on art complained how completely Grünewald, who died in 1530, had fallen into oblivion. He remained in obscurity until, in 1891, J. K. Huysmans in *Là-Bas*, and then in 1894 a German scholar, H. A. Schmid, drew his work out of the darkness. He was then for many years the delight of a not very large circle of experts, artists, and connoisseurs, who ranked him far above Dürer, and even proclaimed the Isenheim altar the highest achievement of German plastic art. The public heard of him, but Colmar, where the Isenheim altar was preserved, was too much out of its way. During the war, when it was brought to Munich for safety and set up there, the German people could see for the first time this most powerful expression of their most secret spirit with their own eyes, shortly before it had to be given up to France. The work, with its uncannily aggressive intensity of devotion, almost as it were on the bridge from the thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries, still quite Gothic, already quite Baroque, Gothic in the immediate nearness, presence and matter-of-fact-ness of the other world, of the kingdom of heaven, but Baroque in its passionate impatience to make the other world real in this, to connect the human and the divine, to establish heaven on earth, has given rise to a whole literature. Among this there is a convincing book by Wilhelm Hausenstein (published by Walter C. F. Hirth, Munich). His survey for the first time puts Grünewald in his proper position, with what went before him as well as what came after, with the Gothic as well as with the Baroque, even as far as Cézanne, and with admirable sense of proportion puts him in correct perspective. While the altar was in Munich, the publisher, R. Piper von Hanfstaengl photographed it, and published a portfolio of the forty-nine pictures, a work in its way quite alone and unsurpassable both in the selection of the views and in the production. By means of this anyone who knows the original can build it up again out of his memory, and those who have never seen it can still gain some idea of its extraordinary effect. This is somewhat meagre comfort for having lost the altar itself, the highest artistic expression of the German spirit to France.

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