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Richard Wagner

His Life & Works



1813—1883.

... THE ...

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Richard Wagner

HIS LIFE AND WORKS.



1813 - - 1883.



THE romantic and highly interesting history of the great German composer, Richard Wagner, indeed forms a delightful and fitting subject for the screen. His was a life full of vicissitudes, hardships and struggles, triumphs and intrigues all battling together in a most amazing manner, and this picture-play paints his career in true and vivid colours, giving us in an enthralling manner the history of one of the greatest of musicians. So many are the incidents in the life of Wagner that it is a difficult matter, in so short a space, to adequately record even a few of the salient points.

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Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig on 22nd May, 1813. Early in life he showed a remarkable talent for music, and after leaving school gave himself up completely to the study of it. At the time when the Polish Revolutionists were flying to Paris he was conducting a Bohemian orchestra, and it was while doing so that his incomparable talents as musician and conductor were revealed. He soon received offers of engage-



The Revolution.

ments, and accepted the directorship of the orchestra at the Magdeburg Theatre. He had little success in this town. It was, however, there that he met his future wife, Minna Planer, a comedy actress, to whom he was married in 1836, after being appointed musical director at Königsburg. Here he incurred many debts, being a most extravagant and improvident man. He was next conductor of the Grand Opera at Riga, but his

creditors followed him to this place. All his furniture was seized, and, having no passport, he was compelled to fly from Russia, intending to go by sea to England en route for Paris. It was during this journey on the rough North Sea that he was inspired to write his famous "Flying Dutchman." After a short stay in London he travelled to Paris where he encountered anything



Liszt and Wagner.

but success, although he met many celebrated men, including Meyerbeer, Heine, and Sir Charles Halle. His Opera *Rienzi* was produced, but in Paris proved a complete failure. Wagner and his young wife now commenced to find themselves in sore straits, but when things were at their worst he received a letter from his brother-in-law telling him that "*Rienzi*" had been

accepted by the Royal Opera House, Dresden. Thither he went, and here this opera had all the success possible, but again he met with disappointment. His work "The Flying Dutchman" proved a dismal failure. In spite of this, Wagner worked enthusiastically over his "Tannhauser," hoping to achieve prosperity with it, but, alas, on October 19th, 1845, this opera when produced also met with a storm of adverse criticism.

About this period, Wagner, under the influence of Martin Bakunin, a Russian agitator, became a rabid revolutionist. He made many red-hot speeches, and encouraged the street fights. He had a narrow escape from arrest when his revolutionary friends, Heutner and Bakunin, were captured, only escaping by flying to Zurich.

It was at this place Wagner wrote most of his compositions, which included his famous works, "The Nibelungen" and "Tristan and Isolde"; the latter seems to have been inspired by the intrigue he carried on with his friend's wife, Mathilda Wesendonck.



Wagner reading one of his Masterpieces.

This caused a final breach between the composer and his wife, who divorced him in 1853. After this occurrence he left Zurich, and travelled all over the world, giving performances of his Operas in most of the large towns, but with very poor results. His funds dwindled down, he could get no one to help him, and so dire were the straits he had fallen into while living in a small hotel in Stuttgart, that he contemplated suicide. He was saved from this, however, by a letter from the King of Bavaria, in which Ludwig expressed his admiration for the great composer, and begged him to come to Munich.

This was in 1864, and from this time onwards Wagner had no more monetary worries. He became a tremendous

favourite at Court and many of the Officials as well as the Jesuits endeavoured to make a catspaw of him to force the King to pass an important Church Bill, but Wagner refused, which caused him to become very unpopular.

In June, 1865, his Opera "Tristan and Isolde" was performed before the King, who was delighted with it, and ordered Wagner to be presented with the sum of 50,000 francs. The composer's unpopularity was fostered by the jealous Ministers, and to such an extent did it grow that Ludwig was persuaded to request him to leave Munich. Grieved though he was to do so, Wagner could not refuse a Royal wish, which



Conducting "Tannhauser."

amounted to a command. He then went to Tribschen, on the Lake of Lucerne, and composed his "Meistersinger." The King visited him there and so did Cosima Bulow, the daughter of Liszt, who had formed a great attachment for him in Munich. Cosima became Wagner's second wife, and they had three children, two girls and a boy.

Wagner was much interested in the building of the celebrated Opera House at Bayreuth, which he accomplished with the help of friends, and it was there that the first "Niebelungen Ring" performance took place in 1878, in the presence of the Emperor William I. and King Ludwig II.



Scene from Tannhauser.

Wagner also built a lovely home for himself in Bayreuth, the "Villa Wahnfried," and it was there he composed his last Opera, "Parsifal." He died in Venice, February 13th, 1883, leaving behind him some of the most wonderful musical works that have ever been heard, and that will live and immortalise his memory for ever.





"Tristan and Isolde.



Ludwig II. and Wagner.

This Picture Play was produced by the Messter Film Company, of Berlin, and is only obtainable from the Gaumont Film Hire Service (The Gaumont Co., Ltd.), 6, Denman Street, Shaftesbury Avenue, London, W.