



GUSTAV MAHLER

(This hitherto unpublished silhouette of Mahler by the famous Austrian artist, Hans Schliessmann, appears here through the kindness of Frau Schliessmann.)

# GUSTAV MAHLER

SONG-SYMPHONIST

BY

GABRIEL ENGEL

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By GABRIEL ENGEL

To  
MY BROTHER  
SOLTON

## *Foreword*

**T**HIS biography is not an unqualified eulogy. It is the first life of Gustav Mahler written by one who cannot boast a more or less intimate personal acquaintance with him. It is, nevertheless, the first account of his life based on his collected letters,\* the recent publication of which has at last made available material proving him to have been a far more human and fascinating figure than the haloes of sentiment cast over him by German biographies will admit. Therefore, the author of this book, the first on the subject conceived and written in English, believes he is justified in having made frequent and generous quotations from these letters, and acknowledges gratefully the kindness of the publisher, Paul Zsolnay of Vienna, in permitting him to make them.

Mahler's compositions receive much the same treatment in these pages as other incidents in his life; for he lived his works, and nothing was more abhorrent to him than the guide-book explanations and programmatic rhapsodies which constitute the rather rambling method of the biographies by his countrymen.

The book is necessarily short; for it is a first word from a new point-of-view. Yet it is no mere chronicle of dates and facts intended to preface an esthetic discussion of the thousand and one details of nine colossal symphonies. It is primarily and almost entirely a narrative.

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\*Gustav Mahler Briefe. Paul Zsolnay Verlag, Vienna.

# I

THE utmost efforts of the studious countryman, Bernhard Mahler of Kalischt, Bohemia, to better himself had net him after many discouraging years only the modest dignity of a rustic private-tutor. The hopelessly cramped environment of the sleepy village mocked his futile bookishness, and calmly watched him waste the best years of his early manhood getting a bare living by driving a wagon or slaving in a factory. To those about him the development of his stern character meant nothing, but as a man destined to become the father of a genius he assumes definite significance in the eyes of a world convinced of the tremendous importance of heredity.

There was no sentiment in the man's emotional make-up. Purely out of an inculcated sense of duty he turned his attention at the age of thirty to the problem of establishing a household of his own. He looked about him shrewdly for an ideal helpmate in this undertaking and decided upon the gentle and obedient Marie Hermann, daughter of a neighboring soap-boiler. There was no question of a love-match, but by sheer strength of will he won the girl's consent. Of the twelve children that issued from this marriage the first, a boy, died in earliest infancy. The second, Gustav, joined the childless couple on July 7, 1860.\*

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\*Biographers are agreed upon July 7. Unfortunately, the written record has disappeared, and since the composer always regarded July 1 as his birthday, this chronological riddle will perhaps never be solved.

The house of Gustav Mahler's birth was the typical little peasant-shack, a dwelling so poor that its windows could not even boast panes. The composer related in later years that this detail and a large puddle of water before the door were for him the unforgettable features of the place. However, Bernhard Mahler had no intention of subjecting his son to the educational disadvantages that had frustrated his own ambition, and the very same year, with baby Gustav only five months old, the little family migrated to the not distant provincial town of Iglau.

The influence of these new, highly picturesque surroundings upon the nature of the growing child was, no doubt, tremendous. The vital atmosphere of the high valley in which the town lay and the deep, hilly woods ranging on every side so rich in mysterious folk-lore surely lent their essence to the colorful music Mahler composed in later years. Besides, Iglau, at that time still untouched by the modernizing railroad, was utterly free from the political excitement racking the outer world. For many generations the townspeople had lived peacefully side by side unswayed by creed differences. The significance of this circumstance must not be overlooked, for although Gustav Mahler was of Jewish extraction, throughout his arduous, yet meteoric rise to the throne of music he never complained of religious discrimination.\*

The early childhood of great men is handed down to posterity in the shape of a few anecdotes chosen to show the first promise of their genius. Of such

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\*Alfred Roller relates that in those last sad days preceding Mahler's resignation from the Viennese Opera House, he said bitterly, "Is it not strange that the anti-semitic papers are the only ones that still seem to have some respect left for me?"

stock stories there are several revealing the phenomenal musical endowment of little Gustav. One tells how at the age of two he could sing hundreds of folk-songs and already exhibited a preference for music of a military nature. More credible, perhaps, is the claim of another that he could at four play correctly on an accordian all the march tunes used in the neighboring barracks. Certainly the Mahler symphonies, with their great wealth of rhythmic material in strikingly martial settings, are eloquent corroboration of the story of the extraordinary little boy who surrendered his soul to the brazen spell of signalling trumpets, and was compelled by some mysterious power to haunt the vicinity of the barracks lest he miss the strange voice of beauty lurking deep beneath this music's stern, drab medley.

The occasion that inaugurated his real musical training occurred upon a visit to the home of his grandparents. The four-year-old child\* was suddenly nowhere to be seen. Anxious search finally located him in the attic engrossed with an old piano upon which he was picking out well-known tunes with the greatest ease.

An anecdote of unusual psychological interest is the following: One day father Mahler took little Gustav with him to the woods, but suddenly reminded of some forgotten chore he decided to hurry back home. Seating the child on a tree-stump, he said, "Stay here and wait. I'll be back very soon." In the meanwhile visitors had arrived at the house, and in the excitement he completely forgot about Gustav until it was almost sunset. Apprehensive, he now ran

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\*According to Mrs. Mahler's preface to the "Briefe."



back to the woods only to find the boy still sitting just as he had been left before, but as though in a trance, with eyes full of wonder, fixed upon some marvelous fancied vision.

Of all the stories of his childhood this one throws most light upon Mahler the creator. There is an uncanny magnificence about this child which is the very soul of all the man's symphonies. Mahler has always been described as merely a seeker, but in reality he is, like all great creative artists, one who has come to us as a revealer. The truth and beauty constituting the soul of each artist's revelation the world has never failed eventually to fathom. The child who found Nirvana in the heart of the woods grew up to endow the world with that incomparable "Song of the Earth,"\* the cradle-song of evolution sung to all life by Nature.

In the light of his lifetime of conflict with environment the following anecdote stands out with keynote significance. Upon being asked by someone what he would like to be when he grew up, little Gustav gave the amazing answer, "A martyr."

Iglau boasted the typical little theatre of the provincial town. Mahler's first activities as conductor were at theatres of similarly limited possibilities. The leader of this theatre, a man named Viktorin, became the child's first music-teacher. He was succeeded by a pianist named Brosch, under whom Gustav's progress was so rapid that he was at the age of seven delegated to teach an older boy. For this service the little pedagogue received five kreutzer (about two cents) an hour. This early affluence was, however, short-lived, for the unhappy pupil was soon unable

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\**Das Lied von der Erde.*

to meet the exacting demands of the young tyrant and tearfully refused to go on with his studies.

Gustav's parents were naturally very proud of his promise and did everything that could be done by people in humble circumstances to hasten his musical development. They nourished in him a sense of responsibility and he grew up with a devotion to home and family that never abated. He understood perfectly that with so many children in the house (he was the oldest of seven) he would be compelled to make his own way as soon as possible.

He was always very fond of books; but in school he was considered inattentive. Now and then a whistled note suddenly invading the academic quiet of the class-room would testify that Gustav was far away in his own musical world, and the teacher would have to drag him back to earth with a shouted warning.

However small from a scholarly viewpoint may have been the face value of his musical education in Iglau, for Mahler its comparative freedom from the letter of the law seems to have been little short of ideal. His mind had the lightning-like grasp and analytic power characteristic of the boy Richard Wagner. Thus a mere hint was sufficient to whirl him unerringly through a whole chapter of complicated musical theory. Unfortunately, the mature Mahler destroyed every bit of his work which struck him as unworthy, leaving posterity no definite idea of the quality of his efforts during these early years. Yet many traits which later found full utterance in his symphonies doubtless took root in these Iglau days. The startling fantasy that caused him to clothe apparent trivialities with mystic, symbolic raiment sought spiritual nourishment through the omnivorous reading of poetic and romantic

works. His early inclination towards the weird and abnormal is attested by the famous musicologist, Guido Adler, his boyhood companion, who says Mahler read with especial avidity the gruesome tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann, our Edgar Allan Poe's great forerunner.

## II

**I**N the minds of his parents there was never any doubt that Gustav possessed gifts and traits predicting artistic greatness. The boy must merely be given his chance at any cost; for the musical and general cultural limitations of Iglau had early become obvious hindrances to his further progress. The solution was simple enough, requiring only added self-sacrifice on the part of the father and mother already heavily burdened with economic responsibilities. Fabulous, golden Vienna, the musical capital of the world, with its famous conservatory beckoned temptingly from a distance of only a few hours. Thither, they decided, must Gustav go.

In the year, 1875, music in Vienna, long a prey to musicians' personal dissensions, practically assumed the character of a political issue. All eyes were riveted on the preparations for the great *Ring* premiere at Bayreuth, when a startling event suddenly sent Viennese musical interest to fever-pitch. Wagner himself was announced as being once more on his way to the hostile capital, in a final drive for much needed devotees and shekels. Sounding the battle-hymn of "Brahms ueber Alles" the horde of anti-Wagnerites, led by the arch-critic Hanslick, redoubled their efforts to discredit "Richard the Great," the best-hated man of his time.

The younger generation, however, fascinated by the heroic appeal of the music-dramatist, was not to be taken in by an army of critics and pedants masquerading as guardians of outraged musical art.

Consequently, when that much-scorned Wagnerite, the shy and patient professor of counterpoint, Anton Bruckner, ascended the platform of a university lecture-hall to deliver his opening address, he beheld to his amazement a far greater and more enthusiastic audience than had ever invaded the peaceful precincts of any course in musical theory. He realized instinctively that his actual significance for these young enthusiasts was not that of a contrapuntal pedagogue, but rather that of a standard-bearer in the exploration of a new, broader world of musical art.

Out of the obscurity of the Austrian provincial districts two boys of fifteen were thrust by Fate into this dramatic setting—Hugo Wolf, fiery fanatic, with his dream of symphonizing the song, and Gustav Mahler, naive seeker, hungry for the experience he still lacked towards adequate self-expression.

Hugo, conscious of his genius and mission, would be guided by none but the supreme opinion and at once sought to win his way to the presence of Wagner, the "Master of Masters." Gustav, far less sophisticated, but patiently analytic, proceeded in solitary silence to weave his own art-creed with the aid of the most vital threads of the old and the new. From the outset the attitude of Wolf spelled rebellion to the Conservatory faculty. His disdainful, uncompromising personality created discomfort in that sturdy bulwark of conservatism, made him exceedingly unpopular, and finally brought about his expulsion from the institution. The germ of a similar spirit at first dormant in Mahler soon began to exhibit itself, but never during his three-year course did it bring him into open conflict with the authorities. He did, however, earn at their hands the descriptive slur, "arrogant."

Among the professors entrusted with the shaping of his musicianship there is one who for his sympathetic and understanding nature deserves a particular place of honor among the potent influences in Mahler's life. Julius Epstein, renowned master of piano virtuosi, purposely overlooked in this youth the possibilities of a world-stirring pianist, lest the exacting drudgery of scales and etudes take too great a toll of precious time that should be devoted to higher artistic purposes. In spite of his desultory application to technical details, the quality of Gustav's performance on the piano was excelled by none in the Conservatory. The orchestral power of his playing attained an almost legendary fame among the reminiscences of his fellow-students. It is said that he took particular delight in performing colossal arrangements from scores, like the "Meistersinger Prelude." Misled by this practice he even fell victim to the lamentable habit of composing at the piano, the resulting defective orchestral scoring proving later the chief reason for his relentless suppression of all his juvenile efforts. A partial register of these ill-starred pieces comprises, in addition to a violin sonata (composed in a single day!), and a piano quartet and quintet, both awarded prizes by the faculty, at least two symphonic works, one on Nordic themes, and fragments of two operas, *The Argonauts* and *Ernest, Duke of Suabia*.

Perhaps the earliest personal Mahler document in existence is the following bubbling letter of thanks written by the youth to his piano-teacher at the Conservatory. Gustav had just returned to Iglau to take his final academic (Gymnasium) examination.

"My Dear and Honored Teacher,

"You cannot imagine what joy your letter brought me. I really do not know how to thank you for such kindness. Were I to write whole pages about it I could accomplish no more than to say 'It is just like you'. And you may be sure this is not mere talk but an expression of genuine, true feeling.

"Your Well-tempered Majesty must pardon me for suddenly modulating by angry dissonances from this expressive Adagio to a savage Finale that calls for your unusually indulgent (*rubato*) interpretation. The fact is I have made my entrance a few bars too late at this Final-exam Concert in Iglau, or rather, I have arrived a few days too late to take the examination and must now wait two months to do so. I hope nevertheless to be able to finish to your total satisfaction the vacation-task you have set me.

"With sincere assurance of my respect and gratitude, I remain  
Your humble pupil,  
Gustav Mahler."\*

The sum of his debt to his two other professors, Robert Fuchs, theory, and Theodor Krenn, composition, is more problematical. The conservatory records show that owing to the great knowledge displayed in his compositions Mahler was excused from the further study of counterpoint after his first season. However, he is said to have regretted this lapse of training in after years, leading us to suspect that the release took place perhaps at his own request. How different in this respect was the thorough Bruckner, to whom not even the contrapuntal slavery of a score of years brought a spirit of independence!

Here again the analogy between Wagner and Mahler in youth is suggestive. It is general knowledge that the former was at the end of six months' study dubbed a master of counterpoint; but it is equally clear that

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\*Gustav Mahler Briefe, Vienna, Paul Zsolnay Verlag; unless otherwise indicated all letters quoted in this book are taken from the above named work.

the composer who undertook the sublime task of setting the *Meistersinger* text to music entered there and then upon a fresh and all-embracing study of the subject. Prof. Weinlig, young Wagner's teacher, may have been the wisest contrapuntal scientist of his time and yet perfectly powerless to fathom the most expressive depths of that art. What a yawning chasm lies between the insignificant perfection of a work by Prof. Sechter and that rugged Everest of inspired counterpoint, his pupil's (Bruckner's) *Fifth Symphony!* In short Mahler, the creative artist, had need of but little academic apprenticeship; for like all great composers he approached each new symphonic labor with that naivete of genius that creates almost instinctively an indissoluble union of context, art, and science.

The value of the instructions concerning musical form dispensed by Prof. Fuchs must not be overrated in Mahler's case; for Gustav, as composition student, seems to have led a double life. When his professors thought he was concentrating upon the production of conventional, "prize-winning" chamber-music he was already wrestling in private with the highest forms, symphony and opera. While he was shamming interest in the delicately constructed serenades of Prof. Fuchs, his fine piano-version of Bruckner's "Wagner" Symphony appeared and bore eloquent witness of the long and passionate study he had devoted to a symphonic work till then perhaps unequalled in its gigantic proportions and freedom of expression. One is here involuntarily reminded of the youthful Wagner's piano arrangement of Beethoven's *Ninth*, a work regarded in 1830 as an ugly, misshapen giant of music.



Only once, for a brief, disappointing moment, did the real artist Mahler in embryo threaten to win immortality in the conservatory annals. For weeks Gustav had been sitting up nights writing out careful copies of the score and instrumental parts of a symphony (perhaps the ill-fated *Nordic*). This drudge work should, of course, have been done by a professional copyist. But that would have required a considerable outlay of money; and Mahler's finances were always at low ebb. At last, however, the trying task was done. With trembling fingers the boy handed the manuscript to Director Hellmesberger, head of the Conservatory, then conducting the orchestra. The parts were quickly distributed, the baton rose and the symphony began. A few bars went smoothly by, but suddenly there arose a discordant muddle of notes, and poor Mahler's heart almost stopped beating. Tap, tap, tap, went the stick. Again the symphony began. But once more the same unfortunate spot brought it up short. Scowling, Hellmesberger turned fiercely upon the unhappy composer, and shouting, "How dare you ask me to conduct a score so full of mistakes!", flung the offending book at the boy's feet. Mahler corrected the score, but nothing could move the stubborn director to grant it another hearing.

The finest feature—one might say, the spiritual crown of Mahler's conservatory days was the remarkable friendship between him and Anton Bruckner. Many anecdotes, some related by Mahler himself, reveal the affection and respect the elder genius had for the younger. On the other hand young Mahler's feeling for Bruckner was nothing short of hero-worship. He attended religiously Bruckner's lectures at the university. In fact the two would usually be

seen entering and leaving the building together. A frequent visitor at the master's home, Mahler was one of the privileged few to whom Bruckner would play passages from a symphony in the making. And highest distinction of all, Bruckner would always escort him down the four flights of stairs and extend his parting greeting at the street-door.

The categorical yes or no to the question whether Mahler was Bruckner's pupil is of no importance in the face of the incontrovertible evidence of this deeper community of feeling; but fortunately the following recently uncovered Mahler letter seems to place the matter beyond further argument:—

"I was never a pupil of Bruckner. The world thinks I studied with him because in my student days in Vienna I was so often in his company and was reckoned among his first disciples. In fact, I believe, that at one time my friend Krzyzanowski and I were his sole followers. In spite of the great difference in age between us, Bruckner's happy disposition and his childlike, trusting nature rendered our relationship one of open friendship. Naturally the realization and understanding of his ideals which I then arrived at cannot have been without influence upon my course as artist and man. Hence I believe I am perhaps more justified than most others in calling myself his pupil and I shall always do so with deep gratitude."\*

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\*Bruckner Blaetter—III. Jahrgang 1931, Nummer 2-3.

### III

CROWNED with highest honors Mahler left the scene of his three years' student-triumphs to spend the summer (1878) as usual at home in Iglau. There with his parents he discussed plans for his future—proud plans born of a provincial naivete; for these people knew little of the scepticism of the world and could not realize that their anticipation of immediate recognition for the gifted conservatory graduate had no more foundation than an air-castle. They believed Gustav had but to return to Vienna in the fall and through the prestige of his academic laurels command the attention of the world of music; that then an opportunity worthy of his extraordinary ability would at once present itself.

Thus the ensuing musical season found an ingenuously hopeful Mahler settled again midst the scenes of his recent student glories. Actual contact with the problem his parents had deemed so easily solved brought him the disillusionment necessary for a more accurate perspective of things as they really were. For a year his sole earnings were gained from one or two piano-pupils—in short, pocket-money. The eighteen year old aspirant never heard even a whispered offer of an appointment as conductor in any theatre. These bitter conditions increased his innate melancholy but did not crush his fervent spirit. The wonders of life and art still held much to fascinate him and dispel the monotony of empty hours. He applied himself whole-heartedly to the study of

philosophy and history at the university. He read the deepest masterpieces of continental literature, and at the susceptible age when most analytic minds fall prey to the scepticism and pessimism of immaturity his romantic nature developed to a degree of ecstasy met with only in the most impassioned of lyric poets.

The brilliant career of Wagner had made him the idol of German youth. Mahler's hero-worship of the great man, however, took the form of actual attempts to follow in his footsteps. Wagner had always been his own poet. Mahler who had just given up trying to set to music a text by a friend, Steiner, suddenly resolved to write his own libretto. The result a long, rhymed affair in ancient ballad style, was perhaps not inferior to Wagner's juvenile attempts; but the world does not know it in its original operatic form, *Das klagende Lied* having in the course of the twenty years preceding its publication undergone many drastic changes, both literary and musical. Its initial setting was completed before Mahler had reached his twentieth birthday, and the work, with its unnatural, almost gory symbolism, derives its chief importance from having been the abstract battlefield upon which the artificial operatic leanings of its young composer were decisively routed by more genuine forces calling for extra-theatrical expression. Its final state reveals the earnest struggle of young genius to adapt its message to some accepted form; but it is nevertheless something unique, a cantata with chorus, but with an orchestral background as rich and complicated as that of a real music-drama.

The choice of theme is reminiscent of the manner of Grimm's fairy tales. A flute fashioned from a human bone by a wandering musician sings a gruesome story

of fratricide committed by a jealous man in love with his brother's betrothed. Grim justice is done when the musician arrives at the murderer's castle and plays the accusing song of the flute just in time to stop the wedding.

As effective as this tale is in cantata form it would have been regarded as little short of romantic burlesque if actually staged in Wagnerian 1880. It was the last attempt Mahler ever made to enrich the world's operatic repertoire through his own composition. A decade later he undertook to finish and whip into shape the posthumous fragments of Weber's *Three Pintos* but this was far less a feat of operatic composition than a self-imposed test of the practical value of his experience in the theatrical field.

As the summer of 1879 approached without the coveted engagement, in order to be spared the humiliation of further dependence upon home he accepted the offer of a wealthy Hungarian to spend the season on a puszta estate. There he was to teach the proprietor's son how to play the piano. Subject to frequent depressing fits of homesickness he sought consolation in writing long letters to his friend, the poet Steiner. Some of these letters have survived and constitute the earliest and in a way the most important documents of Mahler's life. They furnish a vivid, unrestrained portrayal of the struggles of his inmost soul, and seem in relation to the great symphonic chain he later forged almost possessed of the pertinence of a foreword. Their fantastic sentiments make the impression of futile ravings rather than of emotion really felt; but Mahler deprived of the aid of musical notation was generally a sorry poet. His inclination to prophetic apostrophe authentically shown for the

first time in these letters is a characteristic met with at the most eloquent moments of many of his symphonies, when it seems that only the human voice singing flaming words can utter the deep message transcending the powers of mere instrumentation.

A representative excerpt is here quoted:

"O, that some divine power might tear the veil from before my eyes, that they might pierce the very marrow of the world! O, for just one real glimpse of it, this earth, in its primeval nakedness, undecked, and unadorned, as it appears to its Maker! I might then confront its demon-spirit and say, 'I know you now, liar! Your hypocrisy can fool me no more! Your sham sorcery dazzles me not! Behold! He, who once bewitched by the golden glitter of your deceptions fell victim to the fearful lashing of your scorn, faces you now, still unbroken, strong! Cower in your hiding-place! From the Valley of Life I fling this accusation up to you in your cold, lonely citadel! Do you realize how much misery you have heaped upon us here below through aeons of time? Upon this mountain of suffering have you reared your fortress—and laugh! How will you answer the Avenging Judge on that final day, you, who have not stilled the agony of a single tortured soul?'"

The day after this passionate outburst a much calmer and more sincere Mahler wrote:

"I was too exhausted to write further yesterday. I feel like one who after a great fit of rage experiences the consolation of tears. Dear Steiner! You ask me what I do with my time. I'll tell you in a word. I eat and drink, sleep and wake, cry and laugh. I climb hills caressed by the breath of God. I go to the meadow where the tinkling of the herd-bells lulls me to dreaming. But alas! I cannot escape myself! Doubt pursues me everywhere. For me there can be no real joy. Sorrow poisons my happiest moments.

"I am living on the Hungarian puszta with a family that has hired me for the summer. I have to teach the son piano and occasionally lure the family into a condition of musical appreciation. Thus I'm caught here like a fly in a spider's web. However, 'the Moor pays his debt.' But when I go out to the meadow in the evening and climb the linden-tree that stands solitary there and

I gaze out from the top of 'my favorite'\* upon the world, I see before me the Danube winding along on its timeworn way, and in its waves smolders the fire of the setting sun. Behind me in the village the evening bells chime and their chorus is borne across to me by a kind breeze while the branches of the trees sway to and fro in the wind, lulling me like the daughters of the Erlking, and the leaves and blossoms of 'my favorite' caress my cheeks tenderly. Everywhere peace! Holiest peace! Only from afar sounds the melancholy call of the toad sitting sadly among the rushes.

"Then shadowy memories of my life pass before me like long forgotten ghosts of departed happiness. The song of yearning sounds again in my ears and we wander together once more over the old paths. There stands a hurdy-gurdy man extending his hat with his withered hand and in his discordant music I hear the greeting of 'Ernst of Suabia'.\*\* Now Ernst appears suddenly in person stretching his arms out to me and when I look closer it is my poor brother;\*\*\* the veil drops; the visions and sounds grow dim and disappear.

"O my beloved Earth, when, O when will you take the abandoned one into your lap! See, mankind has driven him forth and he flees from its cold, heartless bosom to you, to you! Receive the lonely, restless one, O eternal Mother!

"It is the story of my life that is written on these leaves. Extraordinary fate that tosses me about, now in the grip of sad, vain longing, now in the carefree laughing sunshine. I fear that some day I shall be shattered in the tempest that has so often dealt me cruel blows.

"It is six in the morning. I've just come from the meadow where I was sitting by the hut of Farkas the shepherd, listening to the music of his shalm. Ah, how sadly it sounded, and so passionately ecstatic, the folksong he played! The wildflower that grew at his feet trembled beneath the dreamy fire of his dark eyes and his brown hair waved about his sun-tanned cheeks. Ah, Steiner! You are still asleep in your bed and I have already seen the dew on the grass. I am now so peacefully content and quiet happiness steals into my heart as the spring sun into wintry fields. Will it now be spring in my heart?"

\*Mahler was passionately fond of nature and called the tree his "Liebling."

\*\*The title of the opera text by Steiner.

\*\*\*Mahler's brother Ernst, a year younger, died 1874, aged 13.

The following season proved a very gloomy one for Mahler. Once more the "city of music" could furnish him no greater material consolation than that of a few piano-pupils. Evenings he would attach himself to a group of young, poverty-stricken Wagnerian enthusiasts and over a cup of coffee help wage the abstract battles of the music-dramatist's political and ethical doctrines. Of these sage utterances one the young musicians adopted unanimously was the proposal to regenerate mankind through strict, vegetarian diet. Perhaps the cost of meat-dishes had as much to do with this resolution as the realization that carnivorous humanity was going to the dogs. Meanwhile, only a stone's throw away, in the famous Viennese Opera House a fine performance of *Tristan* or *Meistersinger* might be going on, but the vegetarian society of embryo conductors would try to forget in the heat of argument the stark fact that the real Wagner, he of music, was denied to such as could not afford the price of admission.

For several successive weeks Mahler worked day and night to finish *Das klagende Lied*. The enthusiasm of youth and the spell of inspiration rendered him oblivious of the drain excessive labor was making on his constitution and nerves already weakened by inadequate diet. But one night, exhausted by many hours of concentration upon highly dramatic moments in the work he arrived at a passage in the text calling for the most subtle musical allusion to the thoughts of trees and flowers. A feeling of extreme uneasiness suddenly took possession of him. Some secret force compelled him to keep raising his tired eyes from the paper to watch a certain shadowy corner of the room. In vain he tried to focus his attention on the musical



problem at hand. The weird opposing force was too strong, and at last he surrendered completely. All at once it seemed to him that the wall was coming to life. Someone was struggling furiously to come through it into the room. Now he could see the apparition's face contorted with the agony of hopeless struggle. Suddenly he knew it was his own face! Terror-stricken Mahler rushed from the room. Next day he attempted to continue his work at the point where it had been interrupted by the grim hallucination, but with his very first approach toward the mood which interpreted trees and flowers in terms of music that uncanny sense of hopeless, agonized striving returned to oppress him, and he was again compelled to abandon the composition. Many days of compulsory rest passed by before he could cope successfully with this abnormal mental state.

At last the gigantic cantata was finished, leaving Mahler happy though on the verge of nervous prostration. More than ever he was now convinced that his life-work lay not in conducting but in composition. If only something would happen to provide him with the means necessary for one who should devote himself exclusively to creative work!

With perhaps more hope than confidence he entered *Das klagende Lied* for the "Beethoven Prize Competition" (600 Gulden). The jury, a stone wall of musical classicism presided over by Brahms and Hanslick, had no sympathy for revolutionary tonal utterance. Did those two require more than a single glance at an apparently incoherent score abounding in unprecedented fantastic touches and actually calling for the presence of a second orchestra outside the

concert-hall? However, Mahler awaited a favorable verdict with almost pitiful confidence.

The summer of 1880 had arrived when Prof. Epstein who had long been watching his young protege with some concern suddenly decided he must take a hand in getting him started. Hall, an Upper-Austrian summer resort whose esthetic hunger was satisfied mostly with miserable performances of low farces and other stage monstrosities requiring incidental music, was asking for a conductor, salary 30 Gulden a month. The kind piano professor said to Mahler, "You know I wish you only good. Take this chance."

Mahler did; and closing his ears to the horrified remonstrances of relatives and friends he set out for this first engagement of his career as conductor. The idealist in him condemned to the dung-heap of sham art that was the theatre at Hall suffered tremendously, but there was some comfort in the thought that the period of trial was very limited and experience could not begin too low. The world-famous operatic conductor of later years really had nothing to be ashamed of in this sad, obscure debut the very memory of which he sought to blot out of his life.

The summer over he returned penniless to Vienna to face again the disheartening conditions of his city existence. Almost at once the hope of solving his difficulties through the "cantata" was dispelled by the unfavorable verdict of the judges. However, it developed that the success of Herzfeld, the now forgotten winning candidate, spared Mahler the torturing qualms victory would inevitably have involved; for one of his friends, competing (without his knowledge) went insane from the shock of failure,

and another was almost as unfortunate. Mahler's own discouragement at the time is clearly revealed in a letter to a friend:

"So poor Rott has gone mad; and I fear Krisper is threatened with the same horrible fate. Everywhere stalks Misery, taking most unexpected shapes, as if to mock us poor mortals. If you know of a single happy creature on this earth tell me his name lest I lose the little desire I still have for life. One who has seen so great and noble a nature shattered in this low struggle cannot refrain from horror at the contemplation of his own miserable chances."

The season of misfortune finally came to a close. Suddenly the future, bringing Mahler an engagement of which he need not be ashamed, took on a brighter aspect. Laibach, with a theatre in which real operas were given, was the new scene of his musical activity. Here the young conductor whom extreme poverty had almost banned from attending the Viennese Opera was to experience for the first time the thrill of interpreting serious scores for the stage. Of course no great master-works were given in the small town; but this was a fortunate circumstance for Mahler whose fanatic idealism later caused him to strike from the repertoire of even larger provincial theatres the outraged works of Mozart and Wagner. Each different opera he conducted at Laibach held for him the fascination of a premiere. Unhampered by tradition and prejudice he set out to frame the individual operatic creed which was soon to win for him the respect of musical Europe. Yet the limitations of this particular theatre were very sad—so sad that at a performance of *Martha* the amazed conductor once found himself compelled by the sudden absence of a singer to render the *Last Rose of Summer* himself. This he did good-humoredly, being a very tuneful whistler.

The new world of possibilities Laibach had opened before him assumed more solid form when he accepted the post of conductor at the theatre of Olmuetz for the following season. This, a large town, was a definite mile-post in the early career of operatic conductors. Mahler's decision to continue in this arduous line of work which seemed to spell death to his real mission as composer caused him to spend his short vacation in Vienna in gloomy contemplation. In the company of a trusted friend he would take his customary long walks in the beautiful woods around the city, but hour after hour would pass in depressing silence, though Mahler had the reputation of being a brilliant and eager conversationalist. The friends who heard him play the piano during those days (for he was then still a willing performer) report that he poured a magnificent despair into his interpretation of Beethoven sonatas and Bach fugues, as though he were about to take leave of them forever. He already imagined himself the unhappy one condemned to a life of wandering.

Physically, he could not at this time have been without charm. The grim determination that later almost distorted his face, lending it that deceptively hard appearance which earned him the nickname of "the ugly Mahler," was as yet totally absent from his features. The great nervous energy which called for constant play in some form of work was still tempered by the air of the dreamer characteristic of his childhood days. He was a little below average height, but a wiry, slender figure of perfect proportions obviated any impression of shortness. He had flowing black hair and dark brown eyes which under the stress of great emotion would take on an almost fanatic gleam.

The company of the fair sex was very agreeable to him, but his extreme idealism in those early years caused him to maintain a strictly platoníc attitude towards women. When a girl friend might have been led to believe that some tenderer sign of affection was at last imminent, he would suddenly draw back and burst forth into warning and preaching. At eighteen he had fallen in love with a girl, but when she could move him to no more promising a display of affection than the utterance of some very sound but disappointing advice she sought friendship elsewhere. The shocking news of her suicide not long afterwards could not have been without tremendous influence upon young Mahler's perplexed cogitation of the problems of sex.

Irresistibly drawn to women he would show them an attentiveness beyond the demands of ordinary courtesy. Often he would confide to a friend that he expected soon to succumb to the charms of "the inevitable one." Just before the post of conductor at Olmuetz fell vacant giving him his chance to advance he spent a few days at home in Iglau. The following letter he wrote there is perhaps not without psychological interest.

"The other day I was crossing the Square when suddenly a voice called from above, 'Herr Mahler, Herr Mahler.'

"I looked up and saw in a third story window Miss Morawetz (the youngest, whom I met at your house) who in her naivete and perhaps also her joy at seeing me, could not refrain from calling out.

"I have taken her completely into my care in Iglau, and shown her about everywhere; and she cannot thank me enough. As I write these lines she is sitting in the next room with my sister. And as she is growing quite impatient for me I must close with hearty greetings."

Arrived in Olmuetz towards the end of 1882 his first reaction was one of extreme disappointment; for here too the limited possibilities of the theatre presented disadvantages and humiliations hard for his sensitive nature to tolerate. Besides, he had been led to expect a decided improvement over the conditions at Laibach.

"When the noblest steed," wrote he to a friend, "is hitched to a cart with oxen it cannot do otherwise than sweat and pull along with them. I shrink at the very thought of coming near you—so defiled do I now feel. Thank God, I conduct only Meyerbeer and Verdi here."

Nevertheless he admitted that the staging of Mehul's *Joseph in Egypt* was a real joy. Generally, both musicians and singers were inclined to regard him as a freak; for they could not understand why he tried so hard to infuse enthusiasm into the stereotyped drudgery of rehearsals. Occasionally a spark of his fire would touch them and the resulting rare moment of cooperative sympathy was sufficient balm for Mahler who vowed he was happy to endure "being called a lunatic because of his devotion to the Masters." Usually his frantic efforts to rouse the performers' enthusiasm met with hostile stolidity and then furious and baffled he felt tempted to fling the baton aside and run away.

Although two years had passed since those unforgettable meatless meetings of the young Wagnerians in Vienna, Mahler was in Olmuetz still a vegetarian, claiming bitterly that he went to the restaurant to starve. His income was a little more than it had been at Laibach, but he had set his heart on an unusual extravagance, having made up his mind to attend the next summer festival at Bayreuth.

His conducting at Olmuetz, revealing an intention far beyond his limited material, attracted the notice of the music-director of Kassel, who happened to be present at one of Mahler's performances of *Carmen*. The important man congratulated the young conductor heartily and promised to watch his career with interest. Shortly thereafter a rumor arose that the assistant-conductorship at Kassel was about to be vacated. Without a moment's hesitation Mahler drew enough money to make the expensive trip thither and succeeded in securing the appointment.

#### IV

**B**AYREUTH in 1883 was looked upon by Wagnerians much as a holy shrine, a Mecca of the Faithful, the sole true lovers of musical art. Early that year Wagner, having almost reached the allotted three score and ten, had breathed his last. Thus the performance of *Parsifal* that summer bore somewhat the air of a formal canonization of the almost deified master. The work itself, Wagner's pious farewell from an all but pious life, was actually a magnificent, universal setting of the Holy Mass.

Among the hundreds of notable literary and musical figures thronging the neighborhood of Wahnfried, the Wagner villa, the modest small-town fame of Mahler naturally went unnoticed. However, he had already begun to regard solitude as a most advantageous condition, and in these surroundings packed with distinguished people he had the advantage of remaining obscure and alone and gave himself up wholly to the artistic grandeur of the occasion.

The testimony of the overwhelming impression *Parsifal* made upon Mahler is contained in a few words extracted from one of his letters written immediately after. This has become a significant quotation in the annals of modern music, because while still under the confessed spell of the sacred music-drama Mahler actually conceived and planned his great *Resurrection Symphony*.

"As I emerged from the Festspielhaus," he wrote, "too moved to utter a word I knew that the loftiest



and most agonizing of revelations had just come to me and that it would remain with me throughout my life."

Filled with artistic dreams and longings higher than ever before he entered upon his duties at the theatre in Kassel. As before at Olmuetz, the hopes he had placed in the qualities of the institution immediately proved unfounded. The marvels of stage achievement he had witnessed at Bayreuth rendered him more dissatisfied than ever with the faulty accomplishment of a provincial theatre. Only a few days after his arrival he was again in black despair, complaining—

"It is the same old story; everything has fallen into the usual rut. I must conform. I have borne the humiliation of accepting stupid orders, and bound with one chain after another I am once more in a state of abject dependence."

By December he had reconciled himself somewhat to these disadvantages when the celebrated Buelow arrived in town to conduct a symphony concert. The soul-stirring effect of this performance upon Mahler is revealed by the tone of utter worship swaying his letter to the master conductor the following day. This amazing letter, clearly penned in the strictest confidence, has been recently unearthed and illuminates as does perhaps no other document the tragic inner struggles of the younger Mahler.

"Revered Master!

Pardon the brazen persistence with which I appeal for your attention after having been turned away by the porter of your hotel. I realize only too well that you may consider my conduct beneath contempt. When I first sought an interview of you I had no notion of the blaze your incomparable artistry was to kindle in me. In a word—I am an errant musician groping about in the

intense night of our modern music-world. I have no guiding-star and am the helpless prey to doubts and mistakes. Your concert yesterday was the fulfilment of my highest dreams and hopes of artistic perfection. Listening I felt at once: This is your goal! Here is your master! Your wanderings must end now or never! So I turn to you and implore you! Take me with you—whatever your conditions may be! Let me be your pupil, even though it cost my blood. What I can do—or could do—I do not know, but you can soon find that out. I am twenty-three years old, a student of the University of Vienna and the conservatory of the same city, where I studied composition and piano, and now, after much tossing about, I have been engaged as second conductor at the theatre here. You are well able to judge for yourself how disappointing such a post may be for one who loves and yearns for true art with all his being, and must stand by and see its every holy tenet most shamefully violated. I give myself up completely to you and if you would only accept this gift I should be happy beyond description. Only favor me with an answer and I am ready to pursue any course you advise. O—give me some answer, at least! In suspense,

Gustav Mahler.”

Not only did Buelow refuse to answer, but he abused contemptibly the sacred confidence of those fervently sincere lines written him by the unhappy young genius who so naively believed that innate kindness and artistic greatness were inseparable. In the records of the Kassel theatre, among which the letter was found, there is a telling entry:—

“January 25, 1884;—Received from Conductor Treiber this letter written to Dr. Hans v. Buelow by Music-director Mahler; with explanation that it had been turned over to him by Dr. v. Buelow in person.”

Though nothing was said to the unsuspecting Mahler concerning the letter it certainly did not enhance his popularity with the management.

His immediate superior instilled the venom of his displeasure into a contemptuously uttered “Stubborn

puppy!" Mahler had repeatedly dared to request that more attention be paid "at least the elementary requisites of the art." His unpopularity so swiftly initiated was much intensified in the hearts of orchestra and chorus when they found themselves for the first time compelled to engage in exhausting rehearsals of interminable length. Accustomed to the easy-going carelessness of every-day provincial conductors they now suspected the over-zealous Mahler of malicious intent. So fanatic a devotion to art as his exactions flaunted was far beyond their broadest conception of sincerity. Increasing rage brought them the courage to rebel. They decided to teach the offending upstart a much-needed lesson.

Early one morning a friendly musician burst into Mahler's room in great excitement and implored him to remain away from the theatre that day. Chorus and orchestra had pledged themselves to welcome with sticks and clubs the incorrigible nuisance who inflicted upon them such nerve-racking rehearsals. With a smile of disdain Mahler donned his coat and went at once to the theatre. He entered boldly and walked swiftly to the piano. Then with the energy of a demon he began a rehearsal more exacting than ever. Only after eight hours of merciless driving during which his unerring musicianship converted animosity into wondering admiration, he shut the piano with a bang, rose, looked about him furiously midst awed silence, and, without so much as a single parting syllable, left the hall.

*Parsifal* had brought Mahler added confirmation that his own creative talent lay not in the operatic but symphonic field. Just as he had abandoned the original operatic version of *Das klagende Lied* he now

sacrificed the fragments of another legend-opera *Ruebezahl* upon which he had for some time been working with great enthusiasm. These sudden changes of attitude were characteristic of his pre-symphonic years and eloquent of the rapid and violent spiritual evolution through which he was passing.

A tour de force rather than an artistic contribution was the incidental music he composed for the *Trompeter von Saekkingen* in two days at Kassel. The amazingly facile flow of ideas thus evoked, added to the conviction that the resultant score was far too good for the "living pictures" it accompanied, was at first a source of pride to Mahler; but the inexorable critic in him, soon branding this complacency as plain vanity, led him to regard with little pleasure the publicity this music was getting through performances in many German cities.

He was secretly happy that the real masterpieces of the musical stage did not form a part of the Kassel repertoire. Remembering the artistic horrors of Laibach, where he luckily had the authority to ban the works of Mozart and Wagner, he shuddered as he thought of the injury the incompetent performers of Kassel might inflict upon that music now grown dearer to him than ever. In the fall of 1884, hungry for a taste of real music-drama, he visited Dresden in order to hear *Tristan*. Although the high musical quality of both principals and orchestra delighted him, the interpretation of the conductor, Schuch, left him cold. Condemned on account of his youth to beat time for such grandiloquent banalities as *Robert the Devil*, Mahler was looking forward to the day when as absolute ruler in a great opera-house he would be able to give Wagner as he felt the master should be presented.

It was during these days that he confessed himself really in love for the first time. Blue-eyed, blond-haired Johanne Richter was one of the singers at the theatre. Torn between the spell she cast over him and an ambition dictating solitude and celibacy Mahler was at last face to face with an intense, harrowing experience, the problem of the "inevitable one" he had jestingly predicted. Johanne, romantic and sympathetic, saw how distracted and worried he had become in the course of their few weeks of close friendship. Perhaps she recalled the tragic married life of Minna and Richard Wagner who had met under just the same circumstances. At any rate, she decided they must part. Mahler agreed with her. Thrown together daily by their theatrical duties they found the resolution to separate far easier than its accomplishment. Their constant efforts to loosen their attachment lent the entire love-episode the semi-comical air of an endless leave-taking. Holidays struck them as best suited to the accomplishment of a permanent farewell. They parted at Christmas of that year (1884). New Year's Eve, however, seemed too significant a date to be neglected. They must meet just once again and sever for all time the sweet but troublesome bond. Mahler wrote his confidential friend about the meeting:

"We sat yesterday evening alone at her home and awaited in almost complete silence the arrival of the New Year. Her thoughts were not about the present and as the chimes sounded and the tears streamed down her cheeks the dreadful realization struck me that I was no longer privileged to dry them for her. She went into the adjoining room and stood quietly a while by the window. When she returned, still weeping softly, indescribable pain had set up a barrier between us. I could only press her hand and go. As I arrived at the outer door the bells were ringing merrily and from the tower

came the glorious strains of a chorale. Ah, dear friend, it appeared as if the Supreme Stage-Director wished to give the occasion a truly artistic setting."

Of course, they continued to meet as long as Mahler remained at Kassel. A letter dated May, 1885, takes up the theme:

"When I wrote you some time ago that our affair had come to an end it was only the trick of the shrewd theatrical manager who announces 'Last performance!' only to follow it next day with another."

The final date of his contract at Kassel was only a few weeks distant and once more with no definite prospects in view Mahler fell prey to gloomy forebodings. His mind's eye pictured a renewal of those lean, hopeless days in Vienna when piano-lessons were his sole means of support.

To be sure, the theatre had been a cruel master and had made Mahler a slave. His longing to compose music in great forms had been compelled to satisfy itself with stolen moments of leisure hardly sufficient for the occasional creation of a mere song. Yet even this miserable condition was preferable to a repetition of those days in Vienna the memory of which now returned, vivid and hideous as a nightmare.

Thinking of Johanne he pictured himself at last bound to leave her as one condemned to exile. Unconsciously he had lived himself into that fine cycle of songs, *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*,\* for which he had written several poems under the inspiration of his love for Johanne. In these poems, four of which he then set and orchestrated, he himself is the

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\*"Songs of a Wanderer."

one "driven forth by the blue-eyes of his love"; and he departs broken-hearted to find his only consolation in the unchanging beauty and friendliness of nature. The texts of the songs are couched in the simple romantic language of the old folksong. The tunes have the air of the simplest folktunes. But in the orchestration, prodigally rich and delicate, the real Mahler is evident. The orchestral language is clearly his native tongue. In its vocabulary, the nuances of which he has mastered as perhaps no man before him, he can sigh or weep, smile or laugh at will; he can love or hate profoundly; he can shriek in insane terror or dream as sweetly as a child; he can sneer at the banalities of life or eulogize the grandeur of death.

"I have written a song-cycle," he writes, "at present six songs, all of which are dedicated to her. She does not know them. But they can tell her only what she already knows. Their burden is, a man who has found only sadness in love goes forth into the world a wanderer."

Had not the demands of the theatre consumed practically every bit of his leisure time he would have now devoted himself to the composition of his first real symphony. The experience of *Parsifal* had suggested to him the outlines of a great symphonic work; but these early sketches for it were suddenly supplanted by new, far clearer ideas born of a thrilling emotional adventure that Mahler had lived as a man. Out of the music and plot of the songs he had made "for Johanne" he now determined to fashion his first symphony. Accordingly, he sketched it in detail hoping the near future would bring him the leisure necessary for its completion.

One of the poems not incorporated in the cycle is of unusual interest because he turned back to it more than twenty years later when preparing the text for the symphonic song-cycle *Das Lied von der Erde*.

"The night looks softly down from distances  
Eternal with her thousand golden eyes.  
And weary mortals shut their eyes in sleep  
To know once more some happiness forgotten.

See you the silent, gloomy wanderer?  
Abandoned is the path he takes and lonely,  
Unmarked for distance or direction;  
And oh! no star illuminates his way,

A way so long, so far from guardian spirits,  
And voices versed in soft deceit sound, luring,  
'When will this long and futile journey end?  
Will not the wanderer rest from all his suffering?'

The Sphinx stares grimly, ominous with question,  
Her stony, blank gray eyes tell nothing,—nothing.  
No single, saving sign, no ray of light,—  
And if I solve it not—my life must pay."

Though personally rather unpopular Mahler, as musician, was looked upon by music-lovers of Kassel with a respect bordering on awe. Shortly before the summer (1885) people of influence who had been watching his work at the theatre were so convinced of his outstanding ability that they decided for the good of the big annual music festival to engage him rather than his "superior" as conductor. This unusual stroke of luck with its promise of fame set Mahler to dreaming once more of the higher plane of music whose center was Vienna. Here at last was something of which he might be proud! Vienna too should hear of it!



From a letter to his old friend and teacher Prof. Epstein:

"As you may read in the enclosed clipping, there will take place here in June under my direction a great music festival during which among other things the Ninth Symphony is to be given. Since this is for a young man an extraordinary mark of confidence that places a whole country, so to speak, at his disposal (for all the great musical societies of Hesse and Hanover will participate) perhaps it is pardonable for me to wish that the Viennese also hear something about it. Would you be so kind? Isn't it true, I'm still as 'arrogant' as ever?"

The announcement of the committee's unexpected choice naturally fell like a bomb-shell upon the theatre already extremely hostile to Mahler. Enraged and jealous the "first conductor" warned him to refuse the offer. Mahler, who loved a fight, laughed at him. Then open war was declared. At once rival factions were formed and their heated arguments often culminated in blows.

In order to rehearse each singing society separately, a practice upon which the thorough Mahler insisted, he was compelled to make frequent trips by train to the different towns taking part in the festival. This he did although the travelling expenses made disheartening inroads on his all too slender exchequer, and although he suspected that his enemies might not stop at mere insults should they catch him out of sight of Kassel.

One day, arriving very early at the railroad station, he boarded the still empty local train that was to transport him to the place of rehearsal. Engrossed in the study of the oratorio *St. Paul* which was to be the grand choral offering of the festival he sat lost to the world. Suddenly he looked up from his music,

and realizing that considerable time had passed, he was surprised to find the train still standing at the Kassel station. Looking at his watch he saw that a whole hour had gone by and knew that something must be wrong. Not a soul was to be seen. What was the matter? Getting out of the car, he saw to his amazement that it stood alone and now bore the sign, "Waiting Room." The train had left long before. Making the best of an unpleasant moment he telegraphed that he would be unable to attend the rehearsal.

As ever, the artist in him could not long be silenced by the glamorously soothing voice of prestige. The Augean task of fitting a half-dozen rustic singing societies for the difficult oratorio they had to perform soon brought disillusionment. Writing to a friend, Mahler said:

"You would like to know whether the Music Festival is a source of joy to me. The trouble with it is the same as with all dreams the fulfilment of which one awaits from others. Do you believe that when a couple of singing societies get together to create art anything decent can come of it? It happens to be the fashion just now to be 'festivally' musical—patriotic. My appointment has caused a terrible political battle and lately the entire project for the festival was almost abandoned on this account. It seems that no one, particularly none of the 'trade,' can forgive me my youth. The orchestra is on strike because the chief conductor considers himself disgraced and even the general-director has had the impudence to ask me to give up the festival. Of course, I have refused and now I'm a 'dead man' at the theatre."

Mahler's extremely independent attitude toward the "impresario" was perhaps not entirely due to principle, for good fortune had in the meanwhile come to him in the shape of two flattering offers. The theatre at Leipzig required an assistant to the noted resident-

conductor, Nikisch, for 1886. Close upon the heels of this came a call from the Wagnerian "specialist," Angelo Neumann, who had contracted for the theatre at Prague during the coming season, 1885-6, and wished to have Mahler as assistant to the great Wagnerian, Anton Seidl. With unbounded pride and joy the young conductor leaped at both chances. When preliminary negotiations were satisfactorily concluded he wrote:

"I have much to tell you to-day. First of all you ought to know that I've been engaged by Angelo Neumann as first conductor at Prague from August 1 and that I shall on that day personally conduct *Lohengrin* for the first time in my life. In the course of the season I shall give the *Ring*, *Tristan*, *Meistersinger!* So you see, I'm progressing by leaps and bounds. Alas, this glory will last only a year because the director at Leipzig will not even consider releasing me from my contract for the year following. Well, let the directors fight over me to their hearts' content.

"The Festival is also making great strides and will be inaugurated in a few days with colossal pomp. I've really become popular, a sort of hero of the day. With the exception of my financial troubles, everything seems very bright."

## V

SUCH was the fiery enthusiasm with which Mahler conducted the oratorio *St. Paul* that the Kassel summer festival of 1885 endowed his name with lasting admiration among the music-lovers of the whole region. For Mahler himself it was a particularly significant musical experience; for with it came a realization of the broader and more grateful opportunity for artistic interpretation offered by concert-work. As the last note of the oratorio sounded there was launched a tremendous ovation which gave way only to a pompous, provincial address of gratitude extended the young conductor by the head of the festival committee. Then Mahler was presented with a laurel wreath. But trophies of another sort, a diamond ring and a gold watch, were perhaps no less welcome; for his own watch had for some time been languishing at the pawnbroker's and the forbiddingly expensive outlook of the approaching days (fare to Iglau, to Leipzig, to Prague) seemed to appeal eloquently in behalf of another visit to that convenient institution.

Then came a short rest at home preparatory to a qualifying "trial" month at Leipzig, part of the agreement with the director, Staegemann. This probation period successfully by, Mahler hastened to Prague where his distinguished superior, Seidl, was already busy with rehearsals for the coming season.

*Lohengrin* was to be the opening opera. With nothing short of blissful wonder Mahler watched the

work of the gifted conductor whose artistic creed had received the personal blessing of the great Wagner himself. Seidl's consummate mastery of stage details was a first-hand contribution from the most intimate workshop of Bayreuth, and proved a priceless lesson never to be forgotten by his young colleague. Though Mahler's rare privilege of association with Seidl was soon interrupted by the latter's emigration to America, the brief apprenticeship was sufficient to bring him new hope for the attainment of the perfect stage performance. To be sure, the quality of the Prague orchestra and performers left much to be desired. In fact, this entire operatic venture of the nomadic Neumann, a grandeur evoked almost overnight, exhaled the uncertain atmosphere of a new and speculative affair. Mahler saw at once that the success of the "season" would depend chiefly upon the brilliancy and energy of the conductor. The setting, with its direct challenge to prowess, was the ideal one for his temperament, providing unlimited opportunities for the display of resourceful musical generalship.

Seidl gone, Mahler found himself for the first time in his life in unqualified possession of a major baton. Rising enthusiastically to this long-coveted independence he electrified critics and audience with a series of vivid performances bristling with the originality he had been so long forced to curb. In quick succession there sprang to life under his eager direction the *Meistersinger*, the *Ring*, *Don Giovanni*, and other master-works, singing with an eloquence new to the Bohemian capital of that generation. It seemed at once as if art were Mahler's religion, the conductor's stand an altar, and the score a ritual. Here he felt

really like a high-priest and offered up with an ecstasy of abandon all the "sacred fire" with which he was endowed. He was truly in his element during those first months at Prague.

But the impending shadow of Leipzig, with its threat of compulsory dependence, was a source of great worry to him. The very thought of abandoning the glory he had carved out for himself at Prague for the position as assistant to the formidable and long-established Nikisch was exceedingly painful. Again and again he appealed to the Leipzig director, Staegemann, for his release, but in vain. All he succeeded in getting was a reassurance that he would not be actually subordinated to Nikisch, and would share equally with him the responsibility of directing the *Ring*.

From Mahler, first conductor, to Mahler, tyrant, was, in soul topography, a short distance. Neumann, in addition to his Wagnerian predilections, was diplomat enough to see the peril to normal operatic polity involved in the young man's despotic manner. His sincere admiration of Mahler led him to hope the dreaded day of discontent might be staved off until the end of the season. But the growing unpopularity of the conductor with the cast soon doomed the manager to disappointment.

The occasion for open war was a performance of Gounod's *Faust*. This work owing to its mediocre artistic level and its ballet music was doubly hateful to Mahler and always put him in bad humor. The chief dancer, undisputed empress of her realm, had left specific instructions concerning the interpretation of the ballet. During the performance, however, Mahler paid little attention to these; for he chose to

perform the music as musically as possible. The dancer's rage knew no bounds, and rushing in tears to Neumann she demanded the offender's instant dismissal. To mollify her the perplexed manager scolded Mahler but, fearing the proud "hotspur" would resign at once because of the "insult," went on to shout in assumed anger, "My ballet-mistress has more experience than you! What she orders you to do you must do—and like it! If she tells you to tear the guts out of Faust do so and serve them up to her with a smile!"

In spite of the obvious humor of the situation Mahler felt slighted and demanded that Neumann apologize to him for this "mud-slinging" that had impaired the dignity of his position as conductor in the eyes of cast and orchestra. Neumann evaded the issue but at the close of the season wrote Mahler so warm a testimonial of gratitude for his services that it was accepted in lieu of the formal apology, and they parted the best of friends.

One of the most memorable of Mahler's musical experiences at Prague was his brilliant performance of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, the opportunity for which the sudden, unavoidable departure of Karl Muck, the scheduled conductor, threw his way. With time left for only a single rehearsal, Mahler undertook an almost impossible task, but conducted with such mastery (and without a score!) that the Bohemian audience went wild with joy and pride because it was one of their own countrymen who had performed this remarkable feat.

A far less pretentious concert-program he gave shortly before the close of the season had greater personal significance for him. On that occasion three

of his more recent songs were sung by one of the ladies of the theatre, a Miss Frank, who was perhaps identical with the enamoured "Miss F" mentioned in a letter Mahler wrote a few months later. Just prior to this concert he had made his modest bow as composer, a group of early songs having appeared in print under the title of *Lieder und Gesaenge aus der Jugendzeit* (1885). On the same program there appears also a Bruckner *Scherzo* to witness that Mahler had joined the slender ranks of conductors pledged to the spreading of that neglected genius' fame. Much time had elapsed since those happy hours in Vienna when the curious pair, student and professor, each shyly aware of the other's quality, were to be seen entering and leaving the lecture-hall arm in arm. Remembering this, Mahler wrote Bruckner:—

"I know you are angry at me but I have not altogether deserved it, for tossed about on the tide of life I still regard you with the deep affection and reverence of old. It is one of the aims of my life to help your glorious art to the triumph it deserves."

In July, 1886, after the customary few days of rest at Iglau, Mahler left for Leipzig, the new scene of his operatic servitude. Director Staegemann realizing that a conductor who had repeatedly appealed for release from his agreement might not enter upon his labors with much enthusiasm, tried in every possible way to instil into Mahler the required optimistic spirit. Socially, he made life at once very pleasant for the young musician, introducing him into the distinguished Staegemann family circle; but the real grievance that affected Mahler, his nominal subordination, did not yield to social amenity. Nikisch



had begun to give much of his time to conducting symphony concerts. Frequent calls from distant cities played havoc with his operatic obligations. Thus the schedule of over two hundred performances, the most strenuous season Mahler had ever faced, might not fare too well under two reluctant leaders, one of whom was likely at any moment to take to open rebellion. Besides, Neumann, having serious trouble with Muck, his new conductor at Prague, was in constant communication with Mahler who he hoped might be tempted to rebel and return to his former post.

A Mahler letter hints at the impending trouble:

"The outlook for me here is still dubious. I am dying of longing and homesickness. I have made some splendid acquaintances and met with a warm welcome. The Director has received me into his home circle where I've spent many pleasant hours. Nikisch conducts so efficiently that I almost feel as if I were conducting myself. But the highest and deepest things in music are a closed book to him. I have no personal contact with him whatsoever. He is cold and secretive towards me, whether because of conceit or mistrust—I cannot tell."

For a few weeks he had no real occasion to protest, but with the approach of the season's first *Ring* performance he reminded Staegemann of the promise to divide equally between the two conductors the responsibility of that gigantic music-drama. The promise, however, now proved to have been nothing but a bit of vague diplomacy used as bait to impress Mahler. At once the latter submitted an ultimatum, and the affair languished in this sullen condition, Staegemann refusing to release him, for some time. At length fate solved the situation. Nikisch became seriously ill and was compelled to take a vacation of

six months leaving the rare joys and abundant worries of first and only conductorship to his younger colleague.

Naturally, these six months of Mahler's life developed into a period of utter slavery. Day and night he applied himself like a martyr to the endless array of details involved in the preparation of the most difficult operatic works. It seems incredible that he could maintain a uniformly high level of achievement under so merciless a strain, yet Steinitzer, the noted "Strauss-biographer" and leading Leipzig critic of the time, reports that Mahler seemed to create afresh every bar he conducted.

Through the now delighted Staegemann he struck up an acquaintance with Captain Carl von Weber, the grandson of the great composer. This soon grew into a warm friendship, for the open admiration and sympathy of Mahler for the music of Weber was a source of great delight to the military grandson. The home of the Webers came to be the haven to which the tired conductor would repair after many an exhausting session at the theatre. Here he who loved children would spend an occasional hour of relaxation in the company of the charming Webers of the younger generation. Now and then one of those simple, powerful poems out of *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*, a famous book of German romantic poetry which the children owned, would catch him in the mood for composition, and then he would write down one of those *Wunderhorn* songs which have since become world-famous. Each song was to him the nucleus of a symphonic movement. In the absence of leisure to express himself in larger forms he sought in a few musical phrases to catch the essence of a gigantic

emotional experience. Perhaps out of these songs he might make real symphonies some day when he need no longer slave in a theatre.

Most highly treasured of the Weber possessions was an old sheaf of music manuscript, posthumous fragments of an opera left unfinished by the composer of *Freischuetz*. After the death of Weber his widow had entrusted them to Meyerbeer who had expressed his desire to prepare the work for public performance; but many years passed and the fragments persisted as such. At length Captain Weber inherited them. He was firmly convinced that if the right composer were found the project of completing *The Three Pintos* would prove not only practicable but even a great, popular success. The charming, racy old Spanish tale made into a libretto almost a century before needed but slight revision to fit it for the more sophisticated public of Leipzig. The city loved Weber's music, so much so that a Weber "cycle" including all his operas was as much a part of its musical schedule as a Wagner "cycle." How fine a thing it would be to crown such a series with the surprising added novelty of a completed *Three Pintos*!

In Mahler, the captain was certain, lay the correct solution of this old problem. Here was a musician with superb technical equipment, a young man and yet a man of great culture, a romanticist who could flavor with humor the extreme of sentimentality, and a stage-conductor of wide practical experience,—in short, the right man for the work at hand. Together the two went carefully over the fragments and with each examination Mahler's enthusiasm increased. Swiftly the two reshaped the text and found that, while most of the first two acts had already been

completed by Weber, the whole of the third would have to be subtly set in the romantic spirit of the old master's music.

The summer arrived and Mahler took the fragments home with him to Iglau. The inspiration with which he set to work whipping them into shape is attested by the fact that in two weeks the finished opera lay on his desk. No forgotten piano piece of Weber, from waltz to canon, had been neglected by this demon of energy in his search for the proper genuine material from which the new act must be constructed.

The remainder of his vacation he devoted to elaborating the sketches he had made several years before for a symphony based on the *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. The contrast between real and sham creative work now struck him with the force of a revelation, but he once more suppressed the rebellion in his heart against the conditions that were taking him further and further away from his true self. The symphony spread its wings steadily; but so colossal a work could not be launched after a mere week or two of incessant, clever scribbling. The vacation days were over and he who had in their short span turned symphonist was rudely dragged forth again to the hateful, all-consuming responsibilities of the opera-conductor. This agonizing experience, recurring every year, was the tragedy of Mahler's life.

Director Staegemann was tremendously pleased at the prospect of being able to present the smartly finished *Three Pintos* which Mahler brought back to Leipzig with him in the fall. At once elaborate plans were made to give the work an impressive performance. In the excitement of these, in the pride and joy of his

friend, the captain, and in the daily rehearsal and performance that were part of his regular duties Mahler forgot his private grievance against fate.

Richard Strauss, aged twenty-three, the brilliant protege of Buelow, visited him and listened with delight to portions of the *Three Pintos*. No doubt the fact that Mahler played them for him in person on the piano and thus infused into them an individuality perhaps not present in the score accounts for the rather unfavorable impression the performance of the complete opera made a few months later upon this young eagle of program-music. But Mahler, the conductor, at once found an admirer in Strauss, who in a letter to Buelow after hearing some of his fine Wagner performances thus paid tribute to Mahler's musicianship:

"I have made a new, very charming acquaintance in Mr. Mahler, who strikes me as being an extremely intelligent musician, in fact one of the few modern conductors who understand variations of tempo. He has splendid views on music in general, but particularly about Wagner's tempos, (as opposed to the Mozart-conductors of present-day standing.)"

Upon reading this glowing account of the qualities of the young conductor he had (not long before) so utterly scorned, Buelow must have suffered some qualms of conscience, and yet when Strauss suggested to him that the Austrian seemed also to be a gifted composer, the celebrated "Doctor" merely replied, "You are surely joking." From that moment seems to have dated Buelow's unrelenting antipathy to Mahler's works, an attitude paralleled only by his unwavering scorn for Bruckner through almost a whole generation even in the face of musical Germany's verdict in favor of that symphonist.

The premiere of the *Three Pintos* took place in January, 1888. Midst a Weber-loving public, the performance so carefully and well prepared proved a real triumph. Both Mahler and Captain Weber had to respond to repeated calls from the delighted audience. Next day the newspapers showed the occasion to have been an orgy for the display of critical stupidity. Parts of the opera to which Mahler had not contributed a single note were attacked by the press on the ground of being "un-Weberish." Some episodes which were entirely Mahler's work were hailed as fine samples of the typical Weber genius. However, the people's verdict was overwhelmingly in favor of the novelty, and before the summer it had to be given fifteen times in Leipzig alone. At once theatres in many other German cities also incorporated it in their repertoires. Even Vienna, sceptical nucleus of conservatism, produced it; but the performance was cold and disappointing. The critics of the musical metropolis branded it as a cheap, commercial attempt of a young unknown musician to climb to fame on the shoulders of a great name.

But public success or failure had come to mean very little to Mahler, whose heart was at last deep in the creative delight of his fast-shaping *First Symphony*. Though the season was barely half spent the energetic conductor would now, much to the consternation of Director Staegemann, be seen going about abstractedly, as if he were occupied with mysterious, distant thoughts. At social gatherings he would suddenly rush to the piano in an adjoining room to return elated with the announcement that he had just jotted down a wonderful idea. Sometimes, without apology or explanation, he would leave an amazed group of

friends in order to work in uninterrupted solitude at home.

He was aware of the disappointment and pain he was causing the director, but his long-suppressed genius was no longer to be baffled. He had slaved day after day, unceasingly, at the theatre. He had given himself unstintingly to all but himself. Surely he had deserved a short respite from theatrical responsibilities and social amenities. He could not face Staegemann with this sudden "flare of temperament" but he could venture an appeal for indulgence in writing.

"Please do not be angry at me for writing, when you are really so near-by. I have noticed for some time that owing, perhaps, to a flood of petty worries and annoyances you are out of sorts; but I cannot help feeling that I am also somewhat to blame for your condition. I fear that a misunderstanding between us at present may imperil the friendship that has been such a source of joy to me and has made my position here so pleasant. I confess unhesitatingly that you have sufficient cause to complain about me, for I have long ceased to attend to my duties in the manner you had come to expect of me. I also know that I do not have to offer excuses to you, because the reason for my neglect is sufficiently important to deserve your lenient indulgence. Only a little more patience! Let another two months go by and you will see that I am again the one I used to be."

For six weeks he was a recluse, working incessantly. Day and night were one to him. He lived at the desk alone. Not since that almost insane fit of inspiration a decade before when he had leashed his nerve-racked, half-starved body to the labor of the *Klagendes Lied*, had he worked with such fervor and abandon. No human physique could have borne the strain without weakening. One night he was engaged upon a most delicate, colorful passage in which birds and

woods were voicing the miracle of nature. He was very weary and lifted his eyes gradually from the intricate web of notes which he had just written. His tired gaze wandered about the room, finally coming to rest upon the wreaths of flowers, trophies of the *Three Pintos*, heaped in profusion upon the table in the center. A moment later he attempted once more to concentrate upon the music, but an uncanny feeling had stolen upon him and again he looked up. Suddenly the appearance of the table had changed. It seemed to him as if it were now surrounded by weirdly flickering candles! And on the center, among the wreaths lay a shape,—a corpse! The features were his own! Horrified he rushed from the room.

Finally in the middle of March he was able to sit back, exhausted but happy, and write to a friend:—

“At last my work is finished! Now I wish you were here by my side at the piano so that I might play it for you. Perhaps you are the only one to whom nothing in it will seem strange. The others will have something to wonder about. It has turned out so overwhelming—as if it issued from my heart like a mountain stream.”

Thus ended the “adventure of the soul” leading up to the completion of Mahler’s *First Symphony*. The youth who had wandered and suffered in the world for nearly a decade had at length the consoling balm of living the great experience over in his own heart and, having turned it into a grand orchestral “Wanderer’s Song,” now faced the future a symphonist.



## VI

**M**AHLER rose from the finished score of his first symphony to find the radiant "spring in his heart" met by wintry scowls on the face of Director Staegemann. The friendship that had depended on Mahler's slavish devotion to the affairs of the theatre had been strained to the breaking-point by his dereliction. Of a renewed contract for the coming season there was now no mention, and faced once more with the prospect of no engagement, and consequent poverty, Mahler took to brooding. His financial worries had long ere this been intensified by the expenses involved in the serious illnesses of both his father and mother. Their visits to Vienna for consultation with specialists had become a regular part of the budget the dutiful son had pledged himself to face. With apprehension not unmingled with a desperate hope he watched the last weeks of the operatic season slip ominously by.

In the open resentment of the director every vestige of Mahler's authority at the theatre came to eternal rest. A certain Mr. Goldberg, the "power behind the scenes," took to haunting the rehearsals the discredited musician conducted, and the latter now realized that there was a plot on foot to get rid of him even sooner than the expiration of his contract. Helpless he awaited the dreaded moment. It arrived one morning when Mr. Goldberg intruded himself most insultingly upon some explanations Mahler was

making to the singers. Unable to restrain his anger, the unhappy conductor turned upon the offender. "To-day you have conducted here for the last time!" shouted the mighty "Mr. Goldberg" vindictively. To Mahler's request that Staegemann by some word reinstate him with unimpaired dignity in the eyes of orchestra and singers, the director merely shrugged his shoulders, saying sullenly, "What Mr. Goldberg does I do. I am he." Thereupon Mahler bowed his head and handed in his resignation.

The summer that was thus ushered in promised to be the darkest of his career. To cap the gloomy climax his physical condition, run-down by overwork, suffered the first severe set-back it had ever experienced and he was ordered to go to Munich for treatment. There an operation was found necessary, and after a few weeks of convalescence he arrived home in Iglau, weak and sad, to find his father already marked by swiftly approaching dissolution and his mother so ill that it was clear she could not long survive her husband.

However, the summer was not far advanced before his financial fears, at least, proved to have been unfounded. His abilities as conductor and his high artistic ideals had won him the admiration of many prominent musicians. When the noted Hungarian cellist, David Popper, delegated by Commissioner Beniczky of Budapest, asked Guido Adler, Mahler's boyhood friend, about the young conductor's executive and artistic qualifications, it became clear that Mahler was being considered for a very important position. The Budapest Royal Opera, founded four years before, had through incompetent management and the extravagant evils of the "star" system fallen victim to an

alarming deficit. An ever sinking quality of schedule and performances had brought about a wholesale withdrawal of public patronage. The restoration of this vanishing popular faith was necessary if the "opera" was to survive; and the solution of this problem obviously required a strong and able musical hand. Popper, urged by Adler, recommended Mahler so enthusiastically for the Hungarian post, that Beniczky's doubts (because of the candidate's youth) were dispelled, and Mahler was summoned to a preliminary conference in Vienna. There and then was drawn up a contract the astonishing features of which have perhaps no parallel in the history of music. A conductor twenty-eight years old was by its terms appointed absolute director and given unqualified control of the destiny of a major opera-house for a whole decade. The salary, 10,000 Gulden per annum, was a fortune compared to the miserable wage Mahler had hitherto been slaving for. The only stumbling-block to the agreement was that sudden political changes in the government might exert a disturbing influence over operatic polity; but even such a contingency had been deprived of its threatening shadow by the contract which called for a generous cash settlement should the period of ten years be curtailed for some unforeseen reason.

Thus relieved of all material worries by a mere stroke of the pen Mahler entered upon his duties as director at Budapest in the fall with new-born enthusiasm and confidence. To the amazed and incredulous singers and musicians of the "opera" he made this introductory announcement:—"Let us dedicate ourselves heart and soul to the proud task that is ours. Unwavering fulfilment of responsibilities

by each individual, and complete subjection of self to the common interest, let this be the motto we inscribe on our banner. Expect no favoritism from me. If I may pledge myself to one thing today, it is this, that I shall endeavor to be an example to you in zeal and devotion to work. So let us begin,—and do our duty! Success will surely crown our efforts!"

Since many of the artists understood only Hungarian Mahler had to employ an interpreter. The disadvantages of this condition at once showed him that the quickest way to reach the hearts of the people was through their mother tongue. Before his arrival performances had been rendered ludicrous by "stars," assembled from all quarters of Europe, who insisted upon singing in their native language. Thus it was not an uncommon occurrence for a music-lover of Budapest to hear a text begun in Italian suddenly turn to French, German, or Hungarian during the same performance. Immediately Mahler insisted that the "star" system must go. This drastic demand granted, he found himself left with third-rate Hungarian material. To whip this into shape he was forced to resort once more to a tyranny of long, exhausting daily rehearsals. Gradually the improved quality of the ensemble-work made itself apparent to the audience, which began to increase steadily. Mahler, now become Budapest's lion of the hour, was hailed as a patriot for his diplomatic ruling that Hungarian be the sole language sung at the opera. He had even gone as far as to have Wagner translated into Hungarian and before the season was three months old he was conducting spirited performances of such unheard-of novelties as *A Rajna Kincse* (*Rheingold*) and *A Valkuer* before an audience of Hungarians the

number and enthusiasm of which were without precedent in the annals of the Budapest Opera House. The whole first season proved a distinct triumph for him, although he was able to achieve it only after undergoing greater trials than ever before. He kept strictly his grim promise of tyranny to the musicians and singers and these, seeing the wonders his rigor was bringing to pass, cooperated with him. He in turn displayed a gratified spirit of friendship towards them after working-hours, occasionally inviting some of them to his quarters where they would eat and drink sumptuously at his expense while he told them of his plans and hopes for the future.

Naturally, such revolutionary changes in artistic policy could not but meet with some opposition. One or two temperamental gentlemen of the cast who felt themselves slighted by the "foreigner" demanded satisfaction of Mahler in the traditional southern manner. He was at one time actually compelled to announce in the newspapers that he did not believe in the healing qualities of the duel.

In reality, he now felt himself more the exiled wanderer than ever before. Hemmed in by a strange language which for reasons of art he had even accepted as the sole tongue for his own stage, he felt homesick and lonely, and wrote, "If I could only hear a word sung in German!"

In February of the following year, 1889, his father died. Mahler had been long expecting this blow, and arrived home that summer to find the fast failing condition of his mother hinting grimly the inevitable dissolution of the parental household in the near future. Mrs. Mahler died in October, and the three eldest dependent children, Justi, Emma, and Otto

moved to Vienna, where the "successful" Gustav had assumed the burden of a home for them. He was not of a saving disposition, for he loved the comforts of life. The friends of his youth who had not met with such good worldly fortune always found him ready and generous with his "loans." The termination of the Mahler household at Iglau meant the inauguration of a new series of large but necessary expenditures. To meet these he was always compelled to draw upon his salary before it was due. Finding himself in a state of persistent financial embarrassment he grew more bitter than ever at the fate that forced his shoulder to the wheel of a hated drudgery and he would often exclaim, "That cursed money!" In addition, his brother, Otto, although possessed of great musical talent, was a pathological case, refusing stubbornly to attend to both the academic and musical studies without which he could never amount to anything. His sister, Justi, weakened by the strain of a long spell of attendance upon her dying mother, showed alarming signs of a break-down in health and the distracted, self-styled "head of the family" remarked sadly, "In my family there is always someone ailing."

On November 20th occurred the most important event of his Budapest engagement, the first performance of his *First Symphony*. Tentatively, he had programmed it after the fashion of the day as "Symphonic Poem, in Two Parts." It was in reality a symphony in four movements with a pause of several minutes, (he once personally advised as long as five minutes!) between the second and third movements. The musicians who had come to know and admire him did their utmost to make the difficult work in-

telligible to the audience; but outside of the small circle of his personal friends most of the strangely earnest music fell on unsympathetic ears. The music-lovers, to whom Beethoven and Brahms were the unalterable symphonic gospel, squirmed about uneasily under the forked-lightning of dynamic surprises in this new symphony. During the opening bars of stormy passion in the last movement an elegant society lady in a box became so excited that her handbag and opera-glasses fell with a crash to the floor. Of the two critics who published their opinions on the following day one seemed somewhat favorably impressed, but the other, a certain von Herzfeld, fell upon the symphony with a destructive fury which entitles him to the distinction of having inaugurated a newspaper opposition to Mahler's works that is still flourishing over forty years later and keeping the composer's position in musical history problematical.

During the next three years Mahler kept his first symphonic score hidden away, much as if it had been a secret diary. The wasted performance at Budapest became for him the sad, unpleasant memory of an occasion upon which he had confided his inmost secrets to ears of stone. Meanwhile, he worked steadily to give his sketches for a new symphony definite, clear form, building for it a far greater structure than that of its predecessor. The topic he had chosen to succeed the drama of the "singing wanderer" was "Death and Resurrection," a theme calling for a truly colossal setting. The first longing to compose such a symphony had taken hold of him as early as 1883 when the austerity of *Parsifal* had left its indelible impression upon his mind. Strauss' *Death and Transfiguration*, certainly conceived

later and, happily for the composer, in an idiom and form ideally suited to the epigram-loving disposition of the intelligentsia of the Nineties, had already made its mark, almost establishing a canon of one-movement brevity for the successful symphonic expression of the coming age. Mahler, however, had unhesitatingly set out at a tangent from the artistic inclinations of his day and, convinced of the vital superiority of Beethoven's symphonic creed, felt that a musical artwork must stand or fall by the power of its direct appeal to the heart and that programs were at bottom mere "props," a sort of *Deus ex machina*.

Curiously it was Strauss himself, master of the "new" key to the public's musical heart, who first of all prominent musicians realized the significance of this strange first symphony of Mahler's, written in an unprecedentedly colorful orchestral language. In 1894 (it had had a second vain hearing at Hamburg in 1892) Strauss used his influence so effectively that the work was made the outstanding feature of an important concert at Weimar. Whether or not the proverbial, numerical magic of the "third trial" had anything to do with it, this performance proved at least a partial success, leaving audience and critics sufficiently puzzled to engage in heated after-discussions, an attention most gratifying to the composer.

"My symphony", wrote he to a friend, "met on the one side with unqualified recognition. Opinions were aired on the open street and at private gatherings in a most edifying manner. 'When the dogs begin to bark, we know we're on the way!' Of course, I'm the victor (that is, in my estimation, though the opinion is shared by hardly anyone else). The performance was extremely imperfect owing to insufficient rehearsal. The orchestra, yielding to the persuasiveness of a barrel of beer, proved distinctly in favor of the



work and also of the manner in which I conducted it. My brother (Otto) who was present was highly pleased with the partial failure of the symphony, and I, ditto, with its partial success."

Not without misgiving, yet hoping that such a trick could only have a superficial effect upon the general understanding of the work, while it would certainly make it seem "up-to-the-minute," Mahler announced in the program-book of the concert that the symphony was called "Titan" and followed this with the story of each movement outlined briefly. This led, of course, to much misunderstanding; for many, too fondly versed in the manner of that "prodigal son" of Liszt, Strauss' glittering *Symphonic Poem*, looked upon these romantic explanations much as they would have regarded a "bill of fare," and although they found Mahler's colorful instrumentation highly interesting, protested that the events heralded in the printed "list" had not come off satisfactorily. When the work was finally published three years later, the composer's intentions were revealed as definitely anti-programmatic, for in the printed score all the earlier descriptive phrases are missing; and except for a few general hints to help the conductor's interpretation, the first symphony has been handed down to posterity as a work conforming to the essential principles of absolute music.

Much of the interest aroused by the performance at Weimar centered about the timeworn question whether the relationship between "symphony" and "program" is a natural one. That more or less definite intentions or experiences always form the invisible background of creative work in music has been generally accepted. In this broader sense all symphonic music is "program" music, the deeper and

more personal its message, the richer and more varied its undescribed content. However, it was along this wave of futile controversy the name of Mahler, the composer, was wafted into its first prominence.

Strauss' hearty endorsement of the work added to the fact that the Weimar program still called it a "symphonic poem in two parts," persisted so long as the bone of contention in German musical discussions that Mahler felt at last obliged to publish his personal views on the true content of the symphony. The keynote of his revelation, which he claimed to be the soul of all his symphonic work, (he had by that time finished his *Third Symphony*) was the deceptively simple phrase printed over the opening bar of the *First*, "*Wie Ein Naturlaut*," or freely translated, "as though spoken by Nature."

"That Nature embraces everything that is at once awesome, magnificent, and lovable, nobody seems to grasp. It seems so strange to me that most people, when they mention the word Nature in connection with art, imply only flowers, birds, the fragrance of the woods, etc. No one seems to think of the mighty underlying mystery, the god Dionysos, the great Pan; and just that mystery is the burden of my phrase, *Wie Ein Naturlaut*. That, if anything, is my 'program,' or the secret of my composition. (Mahler was writing this to a prominent critic.) "My music is always the voice of Nature sounding in tone, an idea in reality synonymous with the concept so aptly described by Buelow as 'the symphonic problem.' The validity of any other sort of 'program' I do not recognize, at any rate, not for my work. If I have now and then affixed titles to some movements of my symphonies I intended them only to assist the listener along some general path of fruitful reaction. But if the clarity of the impression I desire to create seems impossible of attainment without the aid of an actual text, I do not hesitate to use the human voice in my symphonies, for music and poetry together are a combination capable of realizing the most mystic conception. Through them the world, Nature as a whole, is released from its profound silence and opens its lips in song."

There were many in the audience at Weimar who felt that the "program-book" should have included more detailed explanations of the work to be performed, with musical illustrations, in the manner of a "guide." One of these music-lovers wrote to Mahler asking him why this practice had not been followed at the concert. The composer's answer, an essential part of his artistic creed, seems to deserve citation.

"I do not believe in misleading the audience at a musical performance with musico-technical details; for misunderstanding, in my opinion, is the inevitable result when one is handed a program-book that asks the audience to see instead of to hear! Of course, I agree that the thematic web of a work should be clear to every listener. But do you think that the mere sight of a few themes can bring that condition about? The understanding of a musical work can be attained only through an intensive study of it; and the deeper a work the more difficult and gradual is this process. At a 'first performance' it is most important for the listener to allow only the general human and poetic qualities of the work to play freely upon the emotions. If these qualities seem to make an eloquent appeal then the work deserves more detailed examination. To draw an analogy, how are we to proceed in fathoming the true nature of any human being, a mystery certainly deeper and greater than that of any of man's accomplishments? Where can we find the 'program-book' to explain him? The solution is similar—we must study him incessantly, with devoted attention. Naturally, man is subject to constant development and change, while a work remains ever the same; but analogies are doomed to lameness at some point or other!"

With this very first symphony Mahler felt that he was making a real contribution to music. The manner in which he considered it to be new is suggested in the confidential letter previously quoted. "You alone will understand it because you know me; to others it will sound strange." He realized that the only possible addition of permanent value to art is the powerful

portrait of a personality. When he said that his work would have to wait long for recognition because there was nothing to link it to the past, he did not have revolutionary technical considerations in mind. He did not mean that his music must be judged by other standards than those of the masters before him. He was merely aware that his orchestral language would seem strange—so strange as to put his message hopelessly out of reach of his time, since only a generation to which the idiom would seem natural and unaffected could be expected to pierce through it to the deep underlying meaning. He regarded Strauss as his "great contemporary," the fortunate creative artist whose idiom had the same pulse-beat as the life about him. Mahler's sharp, ascetic orchestral idiom, assumed the moment he had (in early youth) ceased to compose at the piano, remained his mode of expression to the end. After those juvenile futilities of instrumentation, Mahler espoused with the fervor of faith a purely polyphonic mode of expression, whether a brief song or a gigantic work was involved. Of course, there was a steady development in his mastery of orchestral technique during twenty years of symphonic study and creation, but this development was only in the direction of increased clarity and intensity of expression. Throughout all his colossal works there is apparent an unwavering conviction in the validity of the many-voiced language they speak.

Externally considered this language offers points of contact helpful to a deeper insight of Mahler's individual message. To begin with, all the instruments of the orchestra are for him solo-instruments and hence of equal importance. Each one is exploited not merely

for the clearest musical effect of which it is capable but even more for its most striking emotional accents. Through this analysis Mahler was enabled to endow the orchestral idiom with a psychological power it had never possessed before. The prodigal profusion of his unexpected usages in instrumentation was the strange feature that accounted (and still accounts in a great measure) for the conservative music-lover's misunderstanding of his works.

Perhaps a brief, general catalogue of some of these surprising orchestral habits may not be out of place at this point. Solo flutes which the custom of masters had made the vehicles of sweet melodies were now suddenly heard sounding ethereally, totally bereft of pathos, as if issuing out of infinite distances. The brilliant little E-flat Clarinet, a queer foundling abandoned by Berlioz and carefully reared by Mahler, now invaded the proud precincts of the symphony orchestra a full-blown soloist, bursting forth in occasional mockery, grotesque often to the point of scurrility. Owing to the parodistic gifts of this reclaimed instrument not even the lugubrious atmosphere of a funeral march beclouding life would be safe from an interruption of almost ribald merriment tearing our thoughts away from futile gloom; or the spell of most tenderly sentimental moments might be rudely broken by an instrumental sneer, a practice the validity of which is amply reflected in our daily experience. The oboe, no longer the accustomed high-pitched voice of poignantly sweet pathos, was now heard singing with unstrained accents, in its natural, middle register. The bassoon, on the other hand, suddenly become most eloquent of suppressed pain, would cry out, most convincing in its highest

tones; and the contrabassoon might have a coarse, grotesque remark to make all alone.

The horn (in the treatment of which authorities agree Mahler was one of the greatest masters of all time) had never had so important a role. To the noble level of expressiveness it had attained in Bruckner's hands Mahler added a new power, enabling it by means of dying echoes to carry smoothly an idea already exploited into a changed musical atmosphere. Sometimes a solo horn would issue with overwhelming effect from a whole chorus of horns among which it had been concealed, or singing in its deepest tones it would lend a passage the air of tragic gloom. In Mahler's resourceful use of the horn every register seemed possessed of a different psychological significance.

Short, sharp, fanfaresque trumpet "motifs" (so effectively used by Bruckner in his symphonies) attain apotheosis with Mahler, for either disappearing gently in a soft cadence, or singing bravely on, they soar with ever increasing intensity and breadth to a powerful dynamic climax, to be finally crowned with the triumphant din of massed brass and percussion. Often where usage would recommend the intensification of a melodic line by the employment of many instruments in unison Mahler would save the clarity of the line from the blurring effect of massed voices by having a single trumpet take up the theme with intense passion. Above a sombre rhythm powerfully marked by a chorus of trombones over percussion he would set a solitary trombone to pour out grief in noble, poignant recitative. Never had such significance been given the percussion group as Mahler gave it. His peculiar understanding of this family was

doubtless a result of the fascination with which he had in childhood days absorbed the martial strains issuing from the Iglau barracks. Often he would even combine various percussion instruments, giving even them a share of his all-embracing polyphony, much as if drums too were solo instruments.

"Tradition is slovenly!" was his motto. He rejected every stereotyped means of obtaining a desired effect; and it was often the sheer originality of his solution to an instrumental problem which (while carrying richer meaning) was dismissed by the misunderstanding listener, fed on conventional combinations, as merely grotesque. In this intensified and clarified musical idiom, however, there was nothing actually revolutionary. The whole orgy of amazing polyphony which is Mahler's work, technically considered, signified nothing more than that the inevitable development of the orchestral language had been sent forward a whole generation by the genius of one man.

His great mastery of the color possibilities of each instrument kept Mahler, the absolute symphonist, thoroughly modern in a musical world gone "program" mad. Owing to this knowledge, in those days still new, he could afford to stand aside from those who blindly risked the sacrifice of musical content to the sensational effect of trick instrumental combinations. There was no emotion he could not give clear expression without abandoning a pure, many-voiced melodic method essentially as legitimate as that of Bach. Through orderly contrapuntal "line," scored in his eloquent idiom, he achieved "color," and yet retained that transparent clarity of expression which in the higher orchestral world has become synonymous with the name Mahler.

So striking and vital was the originality of his method that it speedily evoked a "school" of emulators but little concerned with the real content of his symphonies. A generation went by; meanwhile the latest offspring of major music came into existence, the "chamber-symphony," over whose many exclusively solo voices the lineo-coloristic method of Mahler holds paternal sway.

Just turned thirty, he was already a prey to doubts concerning the revolutionary trend of the coming generation. This is clear from one of his letters, dated 1891:

"I have done much reading this year and many books have made a deep impression upon me; indeed, I might say they have caused a complete 'about-face' in my attitude towards the world and life—or perhaps, merely a further development. Has it not struck you that we have already seen the younger generation grow up—the new ideas which we fought for have become common-places) and that we shall have to fight the new youth to protect from their violence what we have gained?"



## VII

THE tremendous combined burden of directing, rehearsing, and conducting at the Budapest Opera House was a greater strain than the physique of one man could endure. Although Mahler was far stronger than his over-slender and somewhat diminutive proportions seemed to indicate, his recent illness necessitating an operation had left him too weak for the almost superhuman labors involved in his official position. Perhaps owing to lack of rest, it soon developed that the operation had not brought the expected relief, and in order to be able to forget the excruciating pain that often made concentration upon his responsibilities impossible Mahler was sometimes compelled to resort to morphine injections.

The condition of his sister Justa failed to improve and the beginning of the summer vacation of 1890 found them both traveling together among the beautiful cities of Italy, breathing in the mild, healing Mediterranean air. Determined to permit no artistic experience to mar this rare period of complete relaxation Mahler religiously avoided visiting museums and cathedrals during the entire trip, confining himself to the enjoyment of the abundant natural beauties about the famous old Italian towns.

After almost a month of this carefree nomadic life (the Hungarian government was paying all railroad expenses) he settled down for the remainder of the summer in the Austrian Alps. Unfortunately frequent visits of theatrical officials from Budapest together

with the problem of passing on the merits of new operatic scores consumed all the time he would have otherwise devoted to creative work.

The musical season of 1890 opened ominous with the political shadow that lurked behind the alleged "absolute powers" conferred upon Mahler by his Hungarian contract. The air was full of the rumor that his musical patron, Count Beniczky, was to be transferred to another field of governmental authority. Untrusting among foreigners and impelled by self-imposed financial responsibilities to his family (Mahler was once more in debt) he anticipated the threatened approach of trouble by communicating secretly with the director of the Hamburg Opera. The position about which their correspondence bargained meant nominally a step backward for Mahler, but in reality Hamburg, the city of the great Buelow, was one of the centers of German music and an operatic conductor there had opportunities for general recognition far beyond those offered by Budapest. At any rate, by the time the transfer of Beniczky became a fact, the agreement with Hamburg was definite—Mahler's call thither to take effect the day of his release from Budapest. Count Zichy, the one-armed piano virtuoso, conductor and poet, who succeeded Beniczky, naturally had opinions and aspirations of his own concerning the "opera." The fact that the institution's deficit had been turned into a profit by the shrewd hand of Mahler did not persuade this new "lord" to leave well enough alone. His very first decree altered the operatic statutes in such a manner that the director suddenly found his position divested of all the authority guaranteed by his contract. Zichy soon began to conduct rehearsals in

person, arranging the repertoire to suit his own anti-Wagnerian tastes. For a week or two Mahler attempted to adjust himself to this most unpleasant situation; but at length sure of his legal ground he tendered his resignation. The contract that called for a period of ten years' service had been clearly broken by the Hungarian government after only a little over two years. Mahler insisted upon a cash settlement and the sum of 25,000 Gulden was agreed upon.

It was during these last days at Budapest that his musicianship received the highest tribute it had as yet been paid. The celebrated Brahms, in the city at the time (January, 1891) could not be induced to attend the opera. Every attempt to persuade him that this young conductor was worthy of even his notice failed to arouse his interest. Finally on the evening of a *Don Giovanni* performance some influential Mahler admirers insisted that the famous composer accompany them to the opera. The great man protested in vain, "Nobody can interpret *Don Giovanni* for me! That is music which I can enjoy only if I sit down and read the score to myself!" Much against his will Brahms found himself one of the audience. Cross as he had been, from the very beginning of the opera his delight and amazement were evident and he would show his appreciation of particularly fine passages by exclaiming from time to time, "Excellent!" "Splendid!" "Remarkable!" "At last, that's just the way it ought to be done!" "What a devil of a fellow that Mahler is!" At the end of the first act Brahms hurried backstage, threw his arms affectionately about Mahler, and said, "That was the best *Don Giovanni* I've ever heard. Not even the Imperial Opera in Vienna can rival it!"

The recognition of Brahms was highly gratifying to Mahler faced once more with the prospect of wandering in quest of fortune. April found him in Hamburg, again just a "first conductor." Deeply analytic by nature he now gathered together the wealth of his years of practical operatic experience in the hope of sifting out a policy that would enable him to adapt these new conditions to his own ideals. The hostile Buelow, his first conquest, recognized at once the authoritative artistic personality reflected by that ascetic face which, when Mahler was conducting, would assume every nuance of emotion from the agony of the damned to the bliss of the transfigured. Mahler still anxious to learn, attended the Buelow concerts as often as he could and was almost embarrassed by the pompous manner in which the famous conductor would bow to him from the stage. Throughout the concert this remarkable man would not miss the slightest opportunity of showing his respect and admiration for the new conductor of the "opera." Regardless of the wonder of the audience Buelow would beckon or smile inquisitively down to Mahler (seated in the first row) during the most beautiful passages of the music, as if asking "Don't you think this is fine?" or "Why shouldn't I be proud of this?" Buelow spoke of Mahler as "The Pygmalion of the Hamburg Opera," implying that his work there had resurrected the institution from the dead.

But here again was the case of a new-found powerful friend who would do all for the executive musician, but shrank in horror from his creative work. After expressing his amused delight at Buelow's ostentatious display of approval, Mahler wrote, "But when I played my *Totenfeier* (*Death-celebration*, the opening

movement of the *Second Symphony*) for him, he fell into a state of extreme nervous terror, carrying on like a lunatic, and exclaimed, 'Next to your music *Tristan* sounds as simple as a Haydn symphony.' Indeed, I'm almost beginning to believe it myself; my symphonies are either maudlin ravings or . . . well, express the alternative for yourself. I've tired of doing it."

So exacting were Mahler's duties in Hamburg that he considered with growing despair the decreasing leisure time left him for composition. He longed more than ever for the day when freedom from the financial worries involved in the total dependence of several members of his family would enable him to take some modest position demanding less time and energy. Yet he never ceased to dread the uncertainty of a conductor's contract, knowing that those he loved would be the worst sufferers if fate really granted him the respite he so coveted.

Just before the summer of 1892 the Hamburg Opera House thrilled with the announcement that its recent excellence had so impressed London music-lovers that the English metropolis had decided upon a taste of real German opera. The exciting invitation to London included a large part of the Hamburg cast and, of course, the new conductor. Immediately Mahler threw himself heart and soul into the study of English, making such headway in a few weeks that he proudly wrote his reports from London in his newly "mastered" language. The following quotation is literal, even orthographically so:—

"Dear Berliner!

I shall only to give you the adresse by you upon your life and other circumstances in Hambourg. I myself am too tired and excited and not able to write a letter. Only, that I found the

circumstances of orchestra here bader than thought and the cast better than hoped. Next Wednesday is the performance of *Siegfried* which God would bless. Alvary: Siegfried, Grengg: Wotan, Sucher: Bruennhilde, Lieban: Mime. This is the most splendid cast I yet heard, and this is my only trust in these very careful time. Please to narrate me about all and am

Yours,

Mahler.

I make greater progress in English as you can observe in this letter."

The enthusiasm of the Londoners for Mahler's "Wagner" was so great that the cause of German opera became a popular one in England thereafter. The following account of the *Siegfried* performance by the same Anglo-Austrian "correspondent" seems very illuminating:

"Siegfried—great success. I am myself satisfied of the performance. Orchestra: beautiful. Singers: excellently. Audience: delighted and much thankful. Mittwoch: Tristan (Sucher). I am quite done up!

Yours

Mahler."

The Hamburg newspapers trumpeted forth proudly the triumphs of Mahler on foreign soil; but the expected reception to the returning hero was dashed by a terrible epidemic of cholera which suddenly afflicted the city, driving thousands of panic-stricken inhabitants to the safety of other parts. Among those who fled many of the singers and opera officials were prominent and the scheduled opening of the musical season was indefinitely postponed. Mahler himself, en route, was compelled to await in Berlin the outcome of an acute attack of stomach trouble which he long suspected to be the dread disease's advance messenger.

The worry and pain of this condition left him more nervous than ever, but he was obliged to report in Hamburg as soon as the epidemic was on the wane.

Shortly after this Buelow fell seriously ill and unhesitatingly named Mahler as his substitute at the symphony concerts he had made part of German musical history. No sooner had the "substitute" conducted the first few bars at rehearsal when the novel character of his phrasing and dynamic effects met with the vociferous disapproval of leading members of the orchestra. Mahler realized at once what a power for evil an exaggerated conservatism could be in the education of musicians. Undaunted he now added a new and difficult aim to his already formidable array of embattled ideals. He determined to free the world of that stupid canonization of the old masters which rendered the slightest critical emendation of their printed pages almost a capital crime. Fearlessly and devotedly he examined the immortal Beethoven *Ninth* and wherever he was convinced that the doubling of an instrument or the raising of a part by an octave would only enhance the clarity of the composer's intention he made that change. Wagner, himself one of the anointed, had made many such alterations in the same score. The highest technical tribunals of music secretly approved of these. So far from being disturbing, such changes improved the work, making its message clearer, more brilliant. So long as no detail of Beethoven's conception was obscured or discarded the consummate grasp of orchestral balance characteristic of the modern composer-conductor could do the great score no harm. That was Mahler's conviction. In his rescoring of Schumann's *Rhenish Symphony* his work of "re-

touching" fell on less hallowed ground and was accepted as law by the whole world of conductors. It is doubtful whether any major performance of Beethoven's *Ninth* to-day excludes entirely the suggestions advanced by Mahler in the direction of increased clarity.

The close of 1892 found the fame of Mahler, the composer, but slightly advanced. A second performance of his *First Symphony*, again under his own direction, met with the warm approval of one leading critic of Hamburg, Pfohl. Otherwise it aroused no interest. In Berlin two of his orchestral songs were given a prominent hearing. The second and third collections of his *Songs from Youth* had just been printed and were helping to pave the way to intelligibility for those movements of his symphonies in which *Wunderhorn* songs formed an integral part of the content.

In 1893 Buelow, in a dying condition, resigned his leadership of the Hamburg symphony concerts and departed for the milder climate of Egypt. He was automatically succeeded by Mahler who conducted the series of eight *Buelow Concerts* in a style as masterly as it was disconcerting to the ultra-classically inclined members of the orchestra. Of the complete sincerity of their opposition Mahler could not convince himself. To him they appeared not only stubborn and stupid, but even deplorably bad artists. His utter discouragement in the face of their attitude is evident from the following letter:—

"Believe me, our art-life nowadays has ceased to have any attraction for me. Always and everywhere the same lying, cursed, and dishonest point-of-view! Supposing I went to Vienna, what sort of reception would my conception of art get there? I would



merely have to show the famous "Hans-trained"\* Philharmonic my interpretation of a Beethoven symphony to meet with the most bitter opposition. Have I not had the experience here in spite of the authoritative position assured me by the unqualified recognition of Brahms and Buelow?

"What a storm of abuse I bring down upon myself whenever I attempt to step out of the beaten path to present some idea of my own! I have only one wish: to be permitted to work in a little town unhampered by stultified 'traditions' or guardians of 'the laws of eternal beauty,'—to work among simple, sincere people and really to serve myself and the few who understand me. If possible, a place where there is no theatre, no *Repertoire!*"

Mahler spent four consecutive summer vacations (1893-6) on the shore of one of the most beautiful Austrian lakes, the Attersee. Here in a little hut, undisturbed except for the occasional clucking of wandering poultry, he gave himself up for a few weeks to the creative work which his operatic obligations in the city made impossible for ten months out of the year. The *Second Symphony* almost reached completion in this ideal atmosphere during his first sojourn there. Only the last movement continued to baffle him; for the convincing conception of "resurrection" powerfully expressed in tone had not as yet come to him.

Buelow died in Egypt early the following year and Mahler was one of the chief mourners when his colleague's remains arrived at Hamburg for final interment. At the funeral services a choral setting of Klopstock's ode *Resurrection* was being rendered when it seemed to him that through its words of hope the spirit of Buelow was addressing him. Suddenly he knew that his symphony must close with human voices singing these words.

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\*Hans Richter, conductor of the Viennese Philharmonic Society.

That year his work at the opera became doubly hateful to him. The second conductor left and the director engaged nobody for the vacancy, thus placing a double burden on Mahler's shoulders. His strict, healthy, routine life alone kept this superhuman task within the bounds of his unaided accomplishment. Retiring late he would rise at seven. While taking a hasty, cold bath he would ring impatiently for his breakfast, a cup of coffee, which he drank a few moments later, completely dressed, smoking a cigarette between sips. He read no newspaper in the morning, preferring to start his day with poems from the *Wunderhorn* or some Goethe or Nietzsche. Then he worked hard at his own music until 10:30, this labor consisting mostly of the preparation of legible, final copies of symphonic compositions feverishly set down the preceding summer. Then followed a brisk walk of three quarters of an hour to the opera house where he was due at eleven for rehearsal. At 2:30, returning also on foot, he would signal his approach from afar with the cheerful, whistled opening notes of Beethoven's Eighth Symphony, so that "Sister Just" would have the soup ready on the table as he entered. During this hearty meal (he had a splendid appetite in those days) he would engage in what was to him the most fascinating of all his daily occupations—reading the mail. In these sealed messages he saw his only hope of release from the hated rut which Hamburg had grown to be for him. "Anywhere at all, only away from Hamburg," was his daily dream of longing and he would refer whimsically to a certain Spirit, who would some day send him the coveted release, as the "God of the Southern Zones." Occasionally some operatic composer would accompany him home

to dinner, but Mahler's financial limitations made it difficult for him to entertain guests as often as he would have liked. Dinner over he would take a short nap, after which he would hurry to the copyist, ever busy on some important work requiring Mahler's personal supervision. Then came a long walk about the quiet outskirts of Hamburg until six when he departed for the evening's performance. He would arrive home late at night, invariably in bad humor, hissing, "The opera is an Augean stable which not even a Hercules could clean!"

Doubtless most prominent musicians of the Nineties were unpleasantly surprised when Strauss put his stamp of approval upon Mahler's *Titan Symphony*, bringing about its performance at the Weimar festival in 1894. Perhaps the prestige of his name was somewhat responsible for the reluctance of critics to engage in the ruthless butchery of the work after the concert. Those who suspected a prank on Strauss' part must have been convinced of their error when he became the first to take the field in behalf of the newly completed *Second Symphony* of the scorned Hamburg conductor. His performance of three of the five movements of this long work in Berlin in 1895 served as a fitting prelude to the actual first complete hearing under Mahler's own baton later in the same year.

A few days before this concert in Berlin Mahler found himself the center of an incredibly difficult artistic triangle. He had simultaneously to prepare the Beethoven *Ninth* for the *Buelow Concerts* in Hamburg, to rehearse his own symphony in a distant city, and to conduct at the Hamburg opera every evening. At the close of the performance at the theatre he would hurry to the train and, after traveling all night,

rehearse till noon in Berlin. Then hurrying back by train he would arrive at the Hamburg opera just in time to give the signal for the opening note.

So gigantic was the chorus that had volunteered for this performance of the *Ninth* that the usual conductor's stand was far too low to furnish Mahler an adequate view of the entire musical scene. Accordingly he ordered that a new, high platform be constructed for the occasion, taking it for granted that the stage carpenter would know exactly what was required. Mahler's complicated duties at this time naturally made it impossible for him to attend to the supervision of petty details and he had his first view of the new platform only as he was hurrying to ascend it midst the thunders of applause a moment before the opening bars. To his dismay he saw that the stupid workman had built a perilously narrow structure literally a whole story high! To delay or retreat now would cause laughter and mar the triumphant occasion. Resolutely Mahler climbed to the summit of the structure. A first moment of dizziness—and then planting his feet so firmly into the planking that people nearby thought he was trying to dig a sure footing in the wood, he raised the baton and the symphony began. Eye-witnesses testify that he stood like a statue riveted to one spot from beginning to end, lifting his arms high to stave off any attempt at applause between the movements of the work. It was a most magnificent display of will-power, all the more remarkable in view of Mahler's extremely nervous feet the involuntary shifting and stamping motion of which was the heritage of a childhood tendency to St. Vitus dance.

On the heels of this concert came the premiere of

his *Second Symphony* in Berlin. The critics now aware that a new young and revolutionary creative force was demanding recognition acted in accordance with the *Beckmesser* tradition immortalized by the still hale Hanslick. Already buffeted by many years of critical unkindness Mahler was steeled against their destructive attack and was more than satisfied with the obvious impression his work had made upon the general listeners. Their spontaneous reaction was, he believed, the only valid criticism of a first performance—and it had been clearly favorable.

Strauss' continued championship of his cause found malicious detractors who insinuated that Mahler in reality regarded himself as a rival of the composer who had so generously befriended him. The following Mahler letter to a prominent critic shows this charge to be preposterous:—

"I shall never cease to be grateful to Strauss who has so magnanimously given the impetus to public hearings of my works. Nobody should say that I regard myself as his rival (although I'm sorry to say the stupid implication has often been made). Aside from the fact that my music should be looked upon as a monstrosity had not the orchestral achievements of Strauss paved the way for it, I regard it as my greatest joy to have met with a companion fighter and creative artist of his calibre among my contemporaries."

Mahler's explanation of the meaning of his *Second Symphony* is limited to the merest noncommittal suggestion. It is in a manner a direct sequel to the *Titan Symphony*, the dead hero of which is during the funereal opening movement carried to his grave. But this *Death-celebration* is not the objective one of the former work where all nature joins in the bitter, cacophonous laughter belittling the fate of a single insignificant bit of creation. The death music is now

subjective and out of its sombre depths rise the ultimate human questions:

"Why have you lived? To what end have you suffered? Is it just a great, terrible jest? We must somehow answer this to prove life worth while, and death life's most magnificent step towards fulfilment."

The last movement, the musical exposition of *Resurrection* inspired by the burial services of Buelow, is the final answer to these questions. The intervening movements unfold the checkered tale of life in which the tenderness of universal love mystically sung is subjected to the cruel and irrepressible interruptions of bitter irony born of the darkest and perhaps most modern feature of Mahler's thoughts—a desperate scepticism. Yet, just as in life, this doubt cannot be victorious, for the soothing promise of subtler, kinder powers that will not be denied lurks constantly behind the yearning melancholy of the music.

Just about this time the condition of the Imperial Opera House in Vienna had become so discouraging owing to an alarming deficit, that rumors began to spread throughout the musical world heralding the installation of a new regime in the immediate future. Mahler must have been forewarned by his guardian "Spirit of the Southern Zones" that his reputation as financial stabilizer in declining opera-houses would probably make him the favored candidate in this emergency. At last his life's fondest dream, of entering Vienna as musical marshal, might be realized, and far sooner than he had dared to hope! With his customary thoroughness and energy he tackled the problem of turning desired probability into happy reality. No helpful detail that was not in direct conflict with his

artistic creed met with Mahler's neglect. The mere suspicion that his lack of formal association with the church might be a hindrance (though he had never suffered from anti-semitism) caused him to go through the ritual of conversion to Catholicism. Thus if he were to meet with any obstacle it could not be that of creed. Certainly, in every other respect he felt himself eminently qualified for the lofty position.

In the summer of 1896 he visited the aged and failing Brahms whose tremendous influence over musical Vienna he succeeded in enlisting. Although the famous composer shrank from even the mildest of Mahler's orchestral creations, branding him as "the most incorrigible revolutionist," he had not forgotten that thrilling performance of *Don Juan* in Budapest five years before. In the Austrian capital Guido Adler, the noted musicologist, did much to direct official attention towards Mahler as the only logical candidate. Then unforeseen, like the reward of "bread cast upon the waters," an important member of the Viennese opera cast, who had more than a decade before sung under Mahler at his memorable concert debut, the Cassel music Festival of 1885, now added her praise of his ability to the already formidable weight of evidence in his favor. Early in 1897 he received a secret summons to Vienna and at once handed in his resignation to Director Pollini of Hamburg.

One of the most pleasant events of his last season in the northern city was the publication of the orchestral score of his *Second Symphony*. His greatest worry had always been for the safety of his manuscripts, the only copies of his symphonic work in existence. Wherever he went, if only for a short

vacation, a heavy trunk of manuscripts would have to go with him or if that were impossible some trusted friend would be delegated to stand guard over the temporarily abandoned treasures. Often Mahler would complain bitterly of a condition that not only made him a baggage-slave, but also made it impossible for him to take advantage of repeated requests for his music by conductors contemplating its performance. One day a merchant of Hamburg, a great admirer of Mahler, heard of this from a musician who made piano arrangements of modern symphonies and at once offered to defray the major part of the expense of printing the *Second*. At the same time Guido Adler set into motion the machinery of influence which brought about the publication in 1898 of the *First* and the recently completed *Third* by the *Bohemian Institute for the Promotion of Art and Science*. Mahler, approaching his thirty-seventh birthday, felt at last that he was on the way to freedom from all material cares, the last of these being totally obscured by the sudden blaze of sunshine from Vienna.

In March, 1897, Weingartner gave the new *Third Symphony* a fractional premiere in Berlin playing three of the seven movements in which Mahler reveals his "happy philosophy." The chapters he chose for the occasion were the "messages of the flowers, the animals, and of love." Mahler's report of the concert in a letter follows:—

"I engaged in two battles yesterday (the 'general rehearsal' and the concert) and am sorry to be compelled to report that the enemy was victorious. There was much approval, but also just as much opposition. Hissing and applause! Finally Weingartner called me and I took a bow. That was the signal for the audience to become really noisy. The papers will tear me to pieces. Justi



appears to be deeply hurt by the 'failure' in Berlin. So far as I'm concerned, the affair meant nothing—in fact, in a certain sense, I'm proud of the 'reception' I got. In ten years those 'gentlemen' and I may meet again."

After a brief unpleasant concert engagement in Moscow, marred by his inability to swallow Russian food and by a narrow escape from train-wreck, he went to Vienna, the city of his dreams. There he was received quietly but with the respect due one secretly invested with full directorial powers over the Imperial Viennese Opera.

## VIII

ALMOST ten years before this Mahler had entered the Hungarian Royal Opera as a sort of efficiency expert, his position proving for the short period of his stay virtually that of artistic director. At the very first rumor that political intrigue was at work to nullify his authority he looked about him for some new field of activity, entering eagerly upon negotiations with Director Pollini of Hamburg, although the proffered position meant voluntary abandonment of a glory nominally far greater. In the northern city, with the mere title of conductor, he had in the course of five years won the recognition generally accorded only the musical ruler of a city. Therefore, upon entering Vienna in 1897, there was no doubt in his mind that ability and energy, not titles, were the sole marks of distinction the music-loving public would respect.

At first the authorities who had called him were still somewhat anxious about the wisdom of their choice and announced his arrival at the opera quietly, as though just another conductor had been added to the rostrum. Jahn, the Director, an excellent musician but an easy-going executive, knew that the newcomer was to be his successor, but with a characteristic pettiness almost pardonable in his temperamental profession, asked Mahler to accept the perilous *Don Giovanni* for his Viennese debut. But Mahler was too wise a batonist to fall into the trap of presenting a Mozart work which he had not himself prepared and

which instinct told him must have fallen into a most deplorable rut in an institution so laxly directed for seventeen years. Until his open assumption of leadership he would restrict himself to performances for which, with even a single rehearsal, he could blaze the way to success by the sheer fire of his conducting.

The gratefully romantic *Lohengrin* was his first offering. That performance still remains one of the most thrilling musical reminiscences of those who happened to hear it. Never before had they felt this vivid score to be so pulsating with every attainable nuance of tone and color. Students of the conservatory, reading the music during the performance, rubbed their eyes in wonder, for though these old strains seemed to sound new there was clear evidence before them in black and white that Wagner had intended them to sound just as they were now heard. Public and press joined heartily in the unstinted praise that welcomed the new conductor. Shortly after this came his first performance of the *Flying Dutchman*, and on the wave of universal approval that met his "regeneration of the Viennese opera-chorus" Prince Liechtenstein, the power behind the institution, felt that the psychological moment had arrived for the open announcement of Mahler's actual position. At first the city learned that he had been "promoted" to the post of assistant-director, but the demonic energy with which the newcomer suddenly began to turn the old order inside out left no doubt in anyone's mind that another regime had been inaugurated at the Imperial Opera. Two months later, in August, this impression was officially confirmed and Mahler publicly named "artistic director."

The changes he made embraced every department in which he saw the possibility for improvement. A born stage-director he had an unerring instinct for the spirit behind the dramatist's intention. He also had a lightning-like grasp of the inadequacy of details that lent an air of sham to the general effect of a setting. One of the first reforms he gave his attention dealt with the exaggerated tendency of most singers towards unnecessary gesturing. He could not see (to give one instance of this) why in a world-famous opera-house the presence of the word "heart" in the text must be accompanied by an expressive raising of the palm to the anatomical region described. Mahler went to the very root of this evil, the conservatory, ordering that operatic students be taught their roles with their arms bound! At the opera he would often insist that the singers rehearse a certain part without any gestures whatsoever.

Of the ultimate virtues of his drastic method there remained no room for doubt after several noted stars of the old order indignantly left to be replaced by comparatively unknown, Mahler-trained singers from Hamburg. One of these, Anna Mildenburg, though possessed of a rather small voice, through the genuineness of her artistry was soon heralded as the greatest actress on the operatic stage.

Although the wooden "posing" of the singers had perhaps contributed more than any other vice toward the ruination of performances, Mahler found other evils the sham quality of which was a definite hindrance to the success of the Viennese institution. At a general meeting of the cast he revealed a plan to do away with that parasite of the opera, the shameful and expensive army of hired applause—the *claque*.

To prevent possible reprisals in the shape of hissing and other vengeful disturbances he proposed to have detectives scattered throughout the gallery ready to arrest any offender instantly. The singers gladly acceded to this measure which meant to them the saving of a considerable percentage of their salary. Then suddenly turning about, he expressed great contempt for their far too frequent instances of sudden indisposition which often compelled the director to announce a change of schedule at the eleventh hour, and demanded that they agree to the added responsibility of a "second-team" emergency casting for each performance. This demand was particularly characteristic of the idealist Mahler who unhesitatingly dashed his head against an opposing wall in the effort to make his way beyond it.

Nevertheless he achieved a certain popularity among them and remembering the transitory nature of such goodwill wrote a friend confidentially:

"What do you think of the pleasant breeze that is blowing here for me? About my being lovable? At this moment I have only three enemies in Vienna, Jahn, Richter, and Fuchs.\* Everybody else considers me very congenial. Brrr! How surprised they are going to be!"

His next reforming blow was directed at the audience, many of whom would nonchalantly saunter into the hall at any time during the first hour of the performance. One morning the Viennese papers announced that by order of the director no late-comers would be admitted until the finish of the first act unless a prescribed pause after the overture permitted tardy entrance without disturbing the progress of the

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\*The other conductors at the opera.

work being given. Fortunately for art the public is basically just whenever it understands the principle involved in the problem requiring its decision. This reform that strikes us as quite natural to-day was really a startling innovation in the Nineties. There has perhaps never been more thankful ground for musical art than Vienna, and, when its music-lovers perceived that the city had been endowed with a daring and able reformer who had the courage of his convictions, they flocked to the opera with a loyalty and enthusiasm that they had not shown for many years. The financial condition of the institution improved so noticeably that Mahler received the personal congratulations of the Emperor and the Prince who both pronounced his rule a great success. Even after the prices of seats at the opera were increased the surplus that remained bore eloquent witness of the popularity of the new director.

The opera orchestra, made up of the finest instrumental performers, also formed the bulk of that little autonomy of music known as the Viennese Philharmonic Society. The annual series of concerts this organization gave was regarded by musical Europe as the apex of executive perfection in the art and the pride with which its members cherished this traditional glory was sufficient guarantee against any inroads of carelessness and indifference on their part. But the cheapened standards of the opera-house, where during the season preceding Mahler's arrival a dainty ballet (Bayer's *Fairy Doll*) had been the most often performed attraction, had made it impossible for the musicians to regard their duties in the theatre with the same earnestness as at the concerts where only the greatest symphonic works were offered.

Mahler became aware of this amazing discrepancy the very evening he conducted his first *Walkuere* in Vienna. At the rehearsal in the morning he had expended much care and time over an important passage for the kettle-drums in the last act, the significance of which had apparently never before been clear to the drummer. At the proper moment during the performance that evening, Mahler gave the necessary signal confidently, but instead of the rehearsed volley of sound only a feeble insignificant tapping greeted his expectant ear. Gazing angrily at the culprit, he saw to his amazement that a different drummer was now sitting in the orchestra. After the final curtain he demanded an explanation and learned that it had become customary for musicians living in the suburbs to leave before the close of the longer operas. Though it was already midnight he telegraphed the first drummer to report to him early in the morning.

From this man he ascertained how hard was the lot of the opera-orchestra with its daily rehearsal and performance. Though Mahler had always been of the opinion that the perfect opera and the daily performance were hopelessly incompatible he could do nothing to change that condition, but hearing how low was the pay of the musicians he succeeded at least in having this increased. Just as at Budapest, he ruled over the musicians with absolute tyranny, but the moment he put down the baton he would treat them as his equals, missing no opportunity to show them the kind heart beneath all this necessary despotism. Every sign of their devotion to art met with a personal expression of appreciation from him. A particularly touching instance of this is recorded in one of his published letters. The occasion was a

silent act of heroism on the part of the first clarinetist, who realized that he was absolutely indispensable at an important premiere then in preparation and kept reporting loyally at his post of duty all through a period saddened by the mortal illness and subsequent death of his child.

"Dear Professor,

I learned at the rehearsal to-day of the misfortune that has befallen you and am most deeply grateful to you for the sacrifice you have made in an hour of great suffering. Rest assured I understand how much self-denial and courage it required to attend to duty at such a time. Please accept my deepest sympathy and most heartfelt gratitude, dear Mr. Bartolomey. I shall never forget this fine deed of yours.

Most sincerely,  
Gustav Mahler."

Gradually the orchestra came to understand him, responding instinctively to every signal he gave. Often this was very difficult, for his manner of conducting, always accentuating the melodic line of the music rather than its superficial division into measures, made it seem as if the bar began on almost any other beat but the first. However, the superior virtues of his style were beyond question when the result was considered. The most significant portions of the scores had never been so emphatically stressed, while transitional passages suddenly sounded livelier and lighter. The Wagner music-dramas, now given for the first time in Vienna without "cuts," proved half an hour shorter than their former, abbreviated versions. Yet they seemed to music-lovers never to have been sung so broadly.

The phlegmatic, good-natured Wagnerian conductor Richter had been loved by these musicians.



A dynamic, tyrannous nature like Mahler's rendered any such sentiment out of the question; but for several seasons the admiring awe which he inspired more than made up for the absence of real affection. During his very first season he was offered the leadership of the Philharmonic concert-series, the greatest musical honor Austria could bestow. Although compelled at this time to conduct every evening at the opera, owing to the frequent real or feigned illnesses of the other conductors, Mahler happily assumed this added burden. For three seasons he conducted the Philharmonic, while audience and orchestra partook in mingled wonder and fear of the strange, almost illicit beauties and "blasphemies" of his readings of hallowed classics. The connection of such a "revolutionist" with this tradition-bound organization naturally aroused bitter criticism among the more conservative element and his honest but tactless open message explaining his Beethoven emendations aroused general horror the force of which has not yet ceased to function at the mention of Mahler's name.

In 1899 the "Philharmonic" played his *Second Symphony*, but although the applause was so spontaneous that one movement (*Urlicht*) had to be repeated the critics proved no more friendly than those of Berlin. The following season, on the occasion of the French World Centennial, the famous Viennese orchestra entered upon a series of five concerts under Mahler at the Exposition in Paris. It proved an expensive venture with a discouraging deficit and cast a heavy pall of gloom over the organization. This financial setback was probably one of the leading reasons for Mahler's subsequent refusal to officiate

over the group in any capacity save that of guest-conductor.

His first few seasons in Vienna proved, all in all, as physically exacting as any he had undergone in previous years, but by 1901 the long-delayed arrival of the modest and reluctant young Bruno Walter furnished him with a highly gifted and devoted assistant who could relieve him of much of his work as conductor. Death and resignation had by now cleared the opera list of all the batonists of the old order, and when Franz Schalk, ambitious and able scion of Bruckner, joined the new regime Mahler was enabled to confine his activities almost exclusively to the preparation of premieres and the supervision of matters of policy involving the artistic welfare of the institution.

Every day he would sit alert by the stage-telephone in the darkness of the director's box watching some rehearsal. His excited, shrill tenor voice (it was normally a deep, friendly baritone) might be heard all morning sending forth that barrage of disapproving criticisms without which he felt the performance could not attain artistic perfection. If *Don Giovanni* were in preparation he might be heard shouting, "What sort of costume is Dippel (*Don Ottavio*) wearing? He is the typical pall-bearer! No Spanish grandee ever looked like that!" Or during the minuet in the second act, with its little orchestra on the stage, "What does that viola player mean, appearing on the stage with pince-nez? If his sight is bad let him wear spectacles!" Then to Sister Justi, sitting beside him, "If I let such nonsense go by they will soon be performing *Fidelio* in monocles." Later at the graveyard scene, "Do you call that a statue? It looks like

paper, not stone. And the face is miserably painted." And to the quaking manager roughly, "Don't let it happen again."

The wounded vanity of some performers secretly favored by the court led Prince Liechtenstein to remonstrate with Mahler, warning him against the *Skandal* his roughness had aroused. Mahler answered, "When the standards of a great opera-house have declined to such a shameful depth as here tyranny is the only cure. Please don't put any stock in these petty complaints, unless—I cause at least two *Skandals* a week." He made full use of his privileges as "king" at the opera and later it became clear to all that his despotism was that of a fanatical idealist and not that of a mere bully glorying in his power. For the time came when he stood discredited in the sight of the powers behind the institution and diplomacy may have proved advantageous, but his tyrannous hand held firm.

The opera season over he would hurry to his own summer abode, now on the shore of the beautiful Woerthersee, a lake frequented by more fashionable people than the scene of his previous vacations. He found it more difficult each year to recapture the threads of the sketches he had been compelled to abandon because of the all too sudden arrival of another opera season. These spiritual hindrances, however, invariably disappeared after a few days of relaxation. In 1900 he finished his *Fourth Symphony*, although the *Third* had not as yet been performed in its entirety. With this (for him) very short and ethereally scored work (there are no trombones in it) he brought to a close the tetralogical cosmos of the human spirit which his first four symphonies are

intended to suggest. In the space of four movements lasting only forty-five minutes Mahler's *Fourth* sings the joys of heavenly existence, supplementing the successful wanderings of the hero in search of faith in the *First*, his death and resurrection in the *Second*, and the praise of universal love and the wonders of nature in the *Third*. Just as in the two symphonies preceding it, the human voice is here called upon to intensify the ecstasy of the music singing the praises of "life in heaven."

The opening of the fifth decade of Mahler's life proved from every point of view revolutionary. The year 1901 shows his symphonic labors suddenly interrupted. The only musical products of that season are lyric, the *Five Songs from Rueckert*. There is one reason and the same reason for both facts—a woman. Turning aside from a long-confirmed celibacy he begins to court the charming young step-daughter of the artist Carl Moll. At the home of the musically gifted and highly congenial Alma Maria Schindler (such is her name) he doffs his grey cloak of solitude and makes every effort to appear the jolly, sociable companion. Alma, at first just fascinated by the attention of the famous director, in the course of a few months knows that she loves him. At length he ventures to propose and she agrees to become his wife.

The marriage took place in March, 1902. Before the close of the year the new household consisted of three, a tiny girl, Maria Anna, having come to join it in November. During this period Mahler composed his immortal setting of Rueckert's *Kindertotenlieder*. When his little daughter died at the age of four, a victim of scarlet fever, friends heard him say in great

sorrow, "Under the agony of fear that this was destined to occur I wrote the *Kindertotenlieder*." Anna Justina, born two years after her unfortunate sister, survived to lessen the heavy weight of spiritual suffering of her father's few remaining years. The death of little Maria seems to have sounded the gloomy keynote of Mahler's tragic closing years, years as poor in solace for him as they proved rich for the rest of mankind through the bounty of his martyred genius.

Mahler's songs had by now attained supreme utterance in the *Kindertotenlieder*. They were threatening to demolish the wavering border-line between orchestral song and symphony, a deed actually accomplished later in *Das Lied von der Erde*. Mahler used to wonder why the superficial effusions of his imitators had become popular while his own *Wunderhorn* songs were almost completely neglected by concert singers. Vienna's reception to its great men of music had always presented puzzling features. Beethoven and Brahms, both foreigners, were the only ones at whose feet the city had fallen. Mozart, Schubert, and Bruckner, true Austrians, had met with utter scorn and neglect the disgrace of which was never wiped out by the storms of contrite tears shed over the modest epitaph facing a brand new "grave of honor." Mahler would say wistfully, "My time will yet come." When any singer of the opera asked permission to program some of his songs at a concert he refused point blank rather than face the question whether the motive prompting the request was personal or artistic.

The year 1902 began encouragingly, with none of his finished symphonic works unplayed. The *Fourth*, under his own baton, had been given in Munich, Berlin

and last, even in Vienna; the *Third* in all its sevenfold philosophic magnitude had come into its own, a first and successful hearing at Crefeld. In Vienna, however no Mahler symphony premiere took place during the composer's life-time.

The composition of a new symphony, the *Fifth*, finished in the summer of 1902 in the peaceful surroundings of his pretty summer villa in Maiernigg on the Woerthersee proved a mysteriously baffling process to Mahler. He realized that he had never before been so contented with life and its prospects. The increasing leisure granted him by the lessening burdens of the opera, most of the performances being now in the hands of reliable subordinates—the happiness of life with an understanding wife whom he loved—the promise of a family of his own soon to be fulfilled—this beautiful summer villa of his dreams—and yet, somehow, he seemed unable to apply to the scoring of this new work the consummate technical equipment which the experience of four huge symphonic labors had brought him. Again and again he would return to the revision of this difficult score and it was not until the last year of his life, 1911, that he could write:

"The *Fifth* is finished. I have been compelled to reorchestrate it completely. I cannot understand how I could have at that time (1902) written so much like a beginner. Clearly the routine I had acquired in the first four symphonies deserted me altogether, as if a totally new message demanded a new technique."

Mahler failed to realize that the spiritual metamorphosis resulting from his changed manner of life was so complete that the *Fifth* was literally a "child of fancy" conceived during a period of *Storm and Stress* and bore inevitably the marks

of the inner struggle characterizing a transitional work. Yet curiously enough, in form, it marks (just as do Beethoven's and Bruckner's *Fifth*) the high point of his symphonic achievement, being a work in the classically sanctioned four movements, an *Adagietto* (the shortest section in all his symphonies) taking the place of the traditional *Andante* or *Adagio*. Technically it presents the orchestral idiom of his former symphonies with its almost exclusively polyphonic method intensified by even greater freedom of melodic fantasy, culminating in that amazing display of contrapuntal artistry in the *Rondo Finale* that has been described as a Triple Fugue. However, it was not until his *Sixth*, begun the following year and finished in the summer of 1904, that the realism of this prodigally polyphonic scoring struck him with convincing force. This work, owing to its persistent pessimism, being the only symphony of Mahler with a dark, unhappy ending, has been aptly called the "Tragic." In one way at least it must be regarded, despite its comparative unpopularity even among Mahlerites, as its composer's most personal expression. Emotionally it answers the requirements of sincere poetry for it recreates in a period of comparative calm the sufferings of twenty years of Odyssean wandering. After a rehearsal preceding its premiere at Essen, 1906, one of his friends, shocked by the extreme bitterness that swayed this work to its ultimate echo, asked Mahler, "How could a man as kind-hearted as you have written a symphony so full of suffering?" "It is," replied Mahler, "the sum of all the suffering I have been compelled to endure at the hands of life."

For those who find comfort in grouping his sym-

phonies "logically," since Mahler himself liked to link the *Fifth*, *Sixth*, and *Seventh* into a trilogy, the fact that the *Fifth* opens with a grim, long trumpet call in a minor key preceding a funeral march seems sufficiently significant to furnish a point of direct contact with the first four symphonies. Only in this case the "program" suggested is a shrinking back from the grave hitherto regarded by Mahler as the symbol of the gate to eternal life. This funeral march has about it nothing of the terrifying *Death-celebration* of the *Second*, nor the weirdness of the *Hunter's Burial* in the *First*, for it sings almost with the serenity and sweetness of a wistful lullaby. It sings the mystic ode of human fate, final interment, a concept of perfect peace from which the soul, loving life, recoils crying and gasping frantically for mortal existence despite all its inevitable pain.

Then followed the *Scherzo*, leaping with unprecedented abandon into the dance of life, weaving the praises of its joys into an almost inextricable polyphonic web of elation, paving the way for the happy and masterly *Rondo Finale*. The *Adagietto* is an interlude of yearning love between these two bright movements, almost giving the impression of interpolation, but deep beneath its graceful, amorous lines is that same haunting suggestion of sadness so characteristic of Mahler.

The *Sixth* is, as has already been stated, autobiographical, and stands starkly realistic in sound and meaning between the "return to earth" (of the *Fifth*) and that eerie exquisite *Song of the Night*, the *Seventh*, conjuring up secrets and mysteries of goblin spirits far beyond the magic spell cast by the immortal *Scherzo* of Mendelssohn's *Midsummer-night's Dream*.



During these years Mahler applied to the proper launching of his symphonies the leisure granted him by the firm status to which his untiring efforts had raised the Viennese Opera House. Because of the open hostility of the Austrian capital towards his compositions he responded gratefully to the offers of assistance he received from foreign cities. In Willem Mengelberg, the musical mentor of Holland, he found a particularly devoted admirer. Mahler's scores would be sent on to Amsterdam, thoroughly rehearsed by Mengelberg (Mahler would often demand as many as seven rehearsals for a symphony) and a day or two before the performance the composer would arrive to take personal charge of the preparations. These flying trips to Amsterdam were a great joy to Mahler and his regard and friendship for Mengelberg grew constantly. The gifted Hollander in turn was happy to take his place beside Bruno Walter, thus becoming the second official Mahler disciple. In 1903 Amsterdam heard with enthusiasm the *First* and *Third*, in 1904 the *Second* and *Fourth*, the latter symphony being actually presented twice in succession on the very same program! Mengelberg's faith in Mahler seems today, a whole generation since, stronger than ever. The world witnessed a most magnificent testimonial of his pledge of life-long service in the cause of Mahler's art at Amsterdam in May, 1920, when he performed a complete cycle of the departed master's orchestral works at the *First Mahler Festival*. The concerts were attended by a host of the most distinguished representatives of the whole world of music. That the occasion, following so close upon the heels of the World War, impressed the listeners as more than a mere music festival, rather as an event

symbolic of the universal love which Mahler so often sang, is eloquently suggested by one of the leading reviewers:

"The last echoes have died away, bringing to a close the most gigantic and overwhelming group of festivities ever given in honor of a musician. What is left? Tablets and monuments, and 'Mengelberg Straat' and 'Mengelberg Plein,' newly named by the cities of Amsterdam and Utrecht in honor of its great musician, and an ineradicable memory in the hearts of thousands of the most beautiful festival of music they have ever experienced.

"Not more? Yes, much more. For this has been more than a music festival. It has been a peace conference—the most genuine peace conference that has been held since the world went to war six years ago. And above everything—we shall remember to the end of our days: that here for the first time Frenchmen and Germans, Italians and Austrians, Englishmen, Americans, Belgians, Hungarians have stood together in the common worship of a genius—of 'enemy nationality' to most of them—on neutral and hospitable soil."

Before this crowning festival Mengelberg had conducted 229 performances of Mahler's orchestral works all over the world, the *Fourth* leading in frequency, with a record of 42, and the dreaded *Tragic (Sixth)* trailing with only five hearings.

In October, 1906, not long after the coldly received premiere of the *Sixth* at Essen, Mahler wrote Mengelberg:

"My *Sixth* appears to be too hard a nut for the tender little teeth of our critics of to-day. Just the same it manages to push its way through the concert-halls. I'm looking forward happily to its performance in Amsterdam. Shall I bring the cowbells with me from Vienna?"

These cow-bells, a set especially constructed to symbolize a distant parting greeting from the valley of life to the wanderer ascending to the peaceful solitude of ethereal heights, accompanied Mahler to

all the performances of the *Sixth*. Besides, he was often tempted to take his trusted first-horn player with him to assure the transcendently difficult passages he had allotted that instrument an adequate performance.

Life had given Mahler scant opportunity for contact with creative artists outside the world of music. One of his dearest friends, Siegfried Lipiner, was a fine poet who wrote austere dramas in the grand manner, and steeped himself in those deep, gloomy problems of the human soul that were always a great fascination to Mahler. The views of this poet on death and the hereafter were of particular interest to Mahler ever since a very serious illness during his early Viennese directorship had brought him face-to-face with the prospect of death. That frequent contemplation of such a nature exerted a sombre influence over his symphonies there can be no doubt; yet in the light of his natural inclination towards the melancholy and the weird this influence cannot be regarded as detrimental and disturbing, but only as supplementary and intensifying. For Lipiner's poetry Mahler had a great love and respect perhaps corroborated by the verdict of no other reader, but here, as well as in music, he cared nothing for the critical voice of tradition and weighed everything on the genuine, if not always accurate, scales of his own intuition.

At the home of his father-in-law, Carl Moll, he listened with supreme interest to the enthusiastic discussions of a group of young painters and sculptors and was delighted with the realization that they represented in their field the same revolt against sham tradition as he in music. One of these, Alfred Roller, had some amazingly fine plans for promoting the unity of light, color, and tone on the operatic stage.

To Mahler, busy at the time with plans for a new staging of *Tristan*, the suggestions of Roller came like a revelation. The "director" suddenly had visions of a great future for the music-drama, with a brilliancy recalling Wagner's own dreams of a perfect unity of the arts. At once Roller was appointed by Mahler to collaborate with him in the preparation of a series of totally new presentations of operatic masterpieces.

A new *Tristan* was the first fruit of their combined genius. Of the music as conducted by Mahler, who had perhaps never before been surrounded with such inspiring incentives, (for his "ideal performance" was at last becoming a fact) it is unnecessary to speak. The greatest tragedienne of the German operatic stage, Mildenburg, sang the role of Isolde with an emotional eloquence that surpassed even her own former superb renditions of the part. But the contribution of Roller lay in the wonders of tragic portent, passion, and suffering he had lived into the settings. The very soul of the ruling emotions of each portion of the music-drama was reflected in the subtle shades of color in which the scene was painted and there was an adapting magic in the changing character of the light that impressed the passionate message of the music more deeply and swiftly than ever before upon the hearts of the audience.

*Fidelio and Don Giovanni*, a Beethoven and Mozart completely regenerated, followed *Tristan*. Every musical detail of these works was exploited by Mahler for its inmost psychological significance and the resulting performance, once more set into the living framework of light and color created by the gifted Roller, proved so vivid and convincing that the music-lovers, lost in wonder, almost believed they

had been attending the premieres of works born in their own day. However, only a few felt the real significance of this collaboration of Mahler and Roller. To such (and Reinhardt was among these) it meant the beginning of a great epoch in the history of the stage of an importance commanding respect beside even the mighty contribution of Wagner.

Unfortunately, these productions were expensive and while they were the delight of the art-loving Viennese they were the source of dissatisfaction among the powers behind the "opera," who would have much preferred saving the money involved. Mahler's repeated demands that he be permitted a grand new setting for the *Ring* met with flat refusal for several seasons and it was only in the last months preceding his resignation in 1907 that a reluctant consent was granted. However, by then the "eleventh hour" of Mahler's decade of authority had arrived and he had once more come to feel how hopeless was his dream of an ideal operatic stage. Forty-seven years old, he longed more than ever for a complete separation from the theatrical duties which had become utterly hateful to him. His position in Vienna was now being seriously threatened and, uncertain what the future held in store for him, he determined nevertheless to accept no further directorial offer from any institution.

The arraignment of Mahler by those determined to oust him included the preposterous charge that he was undermining sacred principles of art; but skin-deep beneath the surface of all the accusations lay the true cause of his "downfall," known to most as the bitter personal enmity of those who nursed private grievances against him. A tyrannous strictness and fanatic devotion to the principles of art had made

it possible for Mahler to raise the Viennese Opera to a position of supreme importance. The very same qualities accounted for his forced departure from that institution.

Many invisible paths led from the theatre to the "high places" of the Austrian court. The Emperor's "special friend" was an actress. The opera ballet hung by the most delicate of morganatic threads to many a left-hand of the highest nobility, old as well as young. The Emperor played his favorite game of cards every week at the house of a certain woman, who was, in turn, a great friend of a tenor whom Mahler had pensioned off in accordance with a conviction that old age and the operatic stage were incompatible. Mahler was unpleasantly surprised one day to receive word from Francis Joseph that the singer must be reinstated. Instead of obeying the implied order he handed in his resignation.

It is unnecessary to quote in full his noble, touching letter of farewell to the members of the "opera." He expressed great sorrow that "instead of the perfect accomplishment of his dreams he had left only incomplete fragments, as man was fated to do." The following day ruthless, hostile hands tore the message from the walls of the "opera" and destroyed it. But ten years of inspired regime had impressed the memory of Mahler unforgettably upon the opera-house and the music-lover. Today, a quarter of a century since, Rodin's magnificent bust of the "Director" stands at last in the opera foyer, but an unusually fine performance in the hall itself, where the greatest dramatic music burst into vivid life under his baton, elicits this tribute from the elderly Viennese music-lover, "Yes, it was fine; but it was a mere reflection of the brilliancy that was Mahler."

## IX

IN August, 1906, with his *Seventh* still unperformed Mahler finished his *Eighth*, known because of the number of singers its choruses require, as the "Symphony of a Thousand." Concerning it he wrote enthusiastically to Mengelberg:—

"I have just finished my *Eighth!* It is the greatest thing I have as yet done. And so individual in content and form that I cannot describe it in words. Imagine that the whole universe begins to sound in tone. The result is not merely human voices singing, but a vision of planets and suns coursing about."

The following summer occurred the sad event which his *Kindertotenlieder* had anticipated, the death of his little daughter. Three months later, on October 15, 1907, he conducted for the last time at the Viennese Opera House. That his resignation had already been tendered and accepted no one in the audience at that memorable last *Fidelio* dreamed.

Mahler's friends, particularly Guido Adler, were soon horrified to hear that he had determined to set out once more, but now in search of fortune. He would leave Austria, Europe, in one last attempt to win success, gold, a worldly victory. He was no longer in robust health, an ever recurring angina having made sad inroads upon his vitality. Three years more, and he would be fifty, just the right age, thought he, for one to retire from the exacting duties of a conductor and devote oneself to the peaceful uninterrupted creation of music and the cultivation of a few chosen friends. With the responsibility of a family, ac-

customed as he had become to a life of comparative luxury, he must look to some source other than the meager annuity granted him by the government that cast him out. To regard as purely material the motives that induced Mahler to accept the offer of Manager Conried of the Metropolitan Opera House is unjust, for the letter of explanation he sent Adler in 1910 from New York certainly reflects no discredit upon him:

"I must have some practical outlet for my musical abilities to balance the tremendous inner experiences of creative work; and the leadership of a concert-orchestra was exactly what I've always longed for. I am glad that this has been granted me for once in my life. Why has Germany or Austria made me no such offer? Am I to blame if Vienna has cast me out? Besides, I am used to certain comforts and luxuries which my pension (the sole reward of almost thirty years of labor as conductor) could not have provided me. Therefore, it was a welcome opportunity which America offered me—not only a suitable position for my inclinations and abilities, but also a salary so generous that it will soon be possible for me to spend the remaining years of my life in the manner held decent by my fellow-men."

By that time Mahler had learned to look with great favor upon the New World, the musical backwardness of which made most distinguished European musicians of those days resort to scornful expression. He had refused to take over from Conried the perplexed steering wheel of the Metropolitan Opera House, and yet he had thrown himself body and soul into the regeneration of the New York Philharmonic Society's orchestra. Fate alone is to blame for the tragic outcome when a heavy traveling schedule of concerts proved too severe for his shattered vitality. The plans he had made after his first taste of American life were clearly full of hope and cheer. To Mengelberg, early in 1908, he wrote:



"I shall spend the next years here in America. I am thoroughly delighted with the country, even though the artistic achievement at the 'Metropolitan' is a very moderate one. But if I were young and still had the energy which I gave unstintingly to Vienna for ten years, perhaps it would be possible to create here the condition which appeared to us at home an unattainable ideal—the exclusion of every commercial consideration from matters pertaining to art—for those in authority here are honest and their resources unlimited."

That summer he returned to Austria, ill and exhausted, to learn from a frank physician that unless he at once abandoned his life of feverish activity for one of complete relaxation his weakened heart must give way. The force of this ominous revelation was crushing to his spirit and sitting hopeless by the table in his little vacation work-hut at Toblach, Austria, he turned for comfort to Bruno Walter, his dearest friend, the man who, as he said, understood him as no other.

"I have tried to come to myself here. Now I have been forced to change not only my abode (Mahler could not be induced to return to his summer home at Maiernigg where his little daughter had died) but also my mode of life. This last, you may well imagine, will be hard for me to do. I have accustomed myself for many years to steady, energetic activity—to wander about in the mountains and woods and carry away with me, like captured booty, the sketches I had made by the way. I went to my desk only as the farmer to the barn—to prepare what I had already gathered. Spiritual indisposition was a mere cloud to be dispelled by a brisk march up the mountain-side. And now they tell me I must avoid every exertion. I must take stock of my condition constantly—walk but little. At the same time in this solitude my thoughts naturally become more subjective, and the sadness of my condition seems intensified. Perhaps I view things in too dark a light—but I feel, here in the country, worse than I did in the city where the various diversions helped me to forget the sad truth. And this is such a glorious place! If only once in my life such surroundings

could have been mine after the completion of a work! For that is, as you well know, the only time when one is capable of carefree enjoyment. At the same time I have noticed something strange. I can do nothing but work; all else I have unlearned in the course of years. I feel like a drug-fiend suddenly deprived of his necessary poison. I am sorely in need of the only hope still left me—patience."

It is no wonder that the symphony he composed in this state of melancholy resignation was one in which he resorted to the human voice throughout, placing upon the lips of the singers those exotic old Chinese verses of desperately repressed suffering the world has come to know as Mahler's *Das Lied von der Erde*. That he did not call this work *Ninth Symphony* (for symphony it is, despite its apparent song-cycle character) is perhaps the result of the naive superstition lent ominous significance by the fact that both Beethoven and Bruckner had died after writing their *Ninth*. Although Mahler did finish another symphony afterwards, the *Farewell* song closing *Das Lied von der Erde* has been almost universally regarded as his own farewell to the world. But those who have also heard his rarely given *Ninth* know that it takes up the burden of the soul at the very point of despair where it has been abandoned by *Das Lied von der Erde*. Then, after an opening movement conceived in the same orchestral phraseology, it returns with unprecedented jollity to the dance of life and culminates in a slow, stately song of optimism, spreading a message of faith as lofty and moving as that of Bruckner's last adagio.

Mahler did not live to hear either of these two symphonies. The premieres of both of them fell (appropriately) to the lot of the great musician to whom Mahler confided his inmost worries during the period

of their composition. Bruno Walter performed *Das Lied von der Erde* in Munich in 1911, a few months after Mahler's death, with such overwhelming effect that it was at once hailed as a masterpiece, worthy, because of the individuality and perfection of its art, of a place of honor beside the *Symphony of a Thousand*. The *Ninth* was given its first hearing at Vienna, in 1912, also under Walter's baton, but proved somewhat disappointing to the critics, who though at last conceding Mahler's significance claimed that this work was the uneven product of a failing master. However, the ensuing reluctance of conductors to program this final symphony was a ban which could not last. It is curious that Doctor Koussevitzky of the Boston Symphony has most recently displayed a tremendous interest in just this neglected work. The welcome reception which the music-lovers of Boston and New York have given his repeated readings of it clearly suggests the possibility that it has been underrated by those who heard it twenty years ago. Perhaps, after all, America is the land of musical promise. Prophetic behind these recurring performances of Mahler in "unmusical" America stands his oft-repeated, patient assurance to doubting European friends after many a discouraging premiere, "Meine Zeit wird noch kommen."\*

There remains only to speak of the *Eighth*, the symphony whose colossal features Mahler had suggested briefly in a letter to Mengelberg in 1906. For four years he withheld this most gigantic of all symphonic scores from an increasingly curious world of musicians. Not until 1910 did he finally yield to the

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\*"My time will yet come."

unceasing prayers of his concert representative Gutmann that he agree to its premiere. He selected Munich as the proper scene for the great event. Months before the date of the performance long series of choral rehearsals had already been entered upon. Mahler in distant America, ascertaining by letter some of the almost insuperable difficulties attending the preparation of the work, wrote frantically to Gutmann that the project was impossible of success and must be abandoned. But Gutmann persisted indomitably and at length the composer was informed that the rehearsals were ready for his final, formative touches. Incredulous he traveled to Munich, only to convince himself that he had been unjust in describing Gutmann's sensational plans as a "Barnum and Bailey" affair.

The much heralded performance, which took place September 12, 1910, Mahler himself conducting, was the greatest and perhaps the only unqualified triumph of his life. In the overwhelming demonstration of joy (for the *Symphony of a Thousand* has been called "the true ode to joy") that followed the last note the whole world of music, eminently represented upon that significant occasion, joined. Mahler, his pale, pain-lined, ascetic features transfigured with happiness by so unparalleled a tribute to his accomplishment, stood motionless on the huge stage while that solitary great storm of enthusiastic applause of his life kept raging. The face of more than one music-lover, to whom the work with its sweeping union of Christian mysticism and pagan pantheism had come as a herald of universal love and faith, must have blanched at the irrepressible and shocking realization that this frail being with the most titanic

soul of all was already marked for mortal dissolution.\*

The winter of 1910 found the composer once more in America. This was his third season of voluntary exile. His health, now completely undermined by repeated attacks of angina, ever more startling, led him to make apologies not only to his friends but at last even to himself for having undertaken a heavy schedule of sixty-five concerts with the New York Philharmonic. His message to an anxious Viennese friend at this time was:—

"I see with satisfaction the distance I still have to traverse here growing ever less, and, if God is willing, I hope in about a year to attain a respectable material status, which will permit me to be somewhere at home, to live and work—a home, I hope, so near my few friends that I may be with them from time to time."

The forlorn hope was at once stamped out by the cruel, almost scurrilous sneer of that inexorable power he had worshipped as the only true deity, Nature—a terrible sneer that burst upon his dreams with even more jarring effect than any disturbing accent of a muted trumpet upon the sweetest of his symphonic measures. On February 21, after conducting his forty-seventh concert of the season, he collapsed utterly. His condition was immediately diagnosed as hopeless.

In vain he journeyed to Paris for serum treatments.

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\*To Leopold Stokowski goes the honor of having brought the *Symphony of a Thousand* to America. In March, 1916, he gave the work nine successive performances in Philadelphia and New York before tremendous audiences. In answer to a recent inquiry concerning those concerts he wrote: "When we played Mahler's *Eighth Symphony* it made an impression on the public unlike anything else I have ever experienced. There seems to be a human quality in this work which so deeply moved the public that the greater part of the listeners were in tears at the end of the performance. This happened at all of the nine performances we gave; so it was not due to an accidental condition on one particular date."

The wisest specialists shook their heads sadly. Then realizing that the end was inevitable he went on home "to die in his beloved Wien." At eleven o'clock on the evening of May 18, 1911, he passed away. He was, in accordance with his wishes, buried in the non-sectarian cemetery of Grinzing, a Viennese suburb. He had left specific instructions that not a word be said nor a note sung at the burial. Contrite multitudes of Viennese stood bareheaded in the teeming rain as the coffin was lowered. And as they turned away heavy-hearted a rainbow appeared to intensify an almost penal silence. On the following day Francis Joseph pompously decreed that the *Symphony of a Thousand* be performed in honor of the great departed Austrian composer and light-hearted Vienna felt it might once more resume the smile a sombre moment had interrupted.

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- Neisser, Arthur:—Gustav Mahler, Leipzig, 1918.
- Roller, Alfred:—Die Bildnisse von Gustav Mahler, Vienna, 1922.
- Specht, Richard:—Gustav Mahler, Stuttgart, 1925.
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FIRST PERFORMANCES OF MAHLER  
IN AMERICA*Symphonies*

- I. New York, December 16, 1909 (Mahler)
  - II. New York, 1908; Boston, Jan. 22, 1918 (Muck)
  - III. New York, Feb. 8, 1922 (Mengelberg)
  - IV. New York, 1904 (Damrosch)  
New York, January 17, 1911 (Mahler)
  - V. Cincinnati, 1905 (Gericke)  
Boston, February 2, 1906 (Gericke)
  - VII. Chicago, April 15, 1921 (Stock)
  - VIII. Philadelphia, March 2nd, 1916 (Stokowski)
  - IX. Boston, October 16, 1931 (Koussevitsky)
- Das Lied von der Erde—New York, Season 1921-1922  
(Friends of Music, Bodanzky)
- Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen—Boston, February 5,  
1915 (Paul Draper)

At the opening of the musical season of 1932-1933 the *Sixth Symphony*, the two movements of the *Tenth Symphony* prepared by Ernst Krenek, and *Das Klagende Lied* are the only major works of Mahler still unperformed in America.



## OUTSTANDING FACTS IN MAHLER'S LIFE

- 1860 —Born, July 7, in Kalischt, Bohemia; removed to Iglau, December of same year.
- 1866 —First piano lessons.
- 1875 —Attended Viennese conservatory (until 1878)
- 1877 —Attended University of Vienna (until 1879); friendship with Bruckner begun.
- 1878 —Mahler's piano arrangement of Bruckner's III (*Wagner*) Symphony published.
- 1880 —First engagement (summer) at Hall, Upper Austria. *Das klagende Lied* finished; revised, 1898; published 1899; first performance, Vienna, 1901.
- 1881-2—Conductor at Laibach.
- 1882-3—Conductor at Olmuetz.
- 1883 —Heard *Parsifal* at Bayreuth.
- 1884 —Composed *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*; published 1897. Conductor at Kassel (until 1885).
- 1885 —Conductor at summer music festival, Kassel. *Lieder und Gesaenge aus der Jugendzeit*, first part, published. Conductor at Prague.
- 1886 —Conductor at Liepzig (until 1888).
- 1887 —Finished Weber's *Drei Pintos*; premiere, Leipzig, 1888.
- 1888 —Director of Royal Opera at Budapest (until 1891.) Finished I Symphony; first performance, Budapest, Nov. 20, 1889; published 1898.
- 1891 —Conductor at Hamburg Opera House (until 1897).
- 1892 —Conductor of German opera troupe in London. *Lieder und Gesaenge aus der Jugendzeit*, parts II and III published.
- 1894 —Finished II Symphony; first performance, Berlin, 1895.
- 1896 —Finished III Symphony; first performance (2 movements) Berlin 1896; the whole work, Krefeld, 1902; published 1898.
- 1897 —Conductor at Imperial Opera, Vienna, May. Director at Imperial Opera, Vienna, July. Artistic Director at Imperial Opera, Vienna, October (until 1907).
- 1900 —Finished IV Symphony; first performance, Munich, 1902; published 1901.

- 1902 —Finished *Kindertotenlieder*; first performance, Vienna, 1905; published 1905.  
*Five Songs from Rueckert*; published 1905.  
Finished V Symphony; first performance, Cologne, 1904; published, 1905.  
Married Alma Maria Schindler, March 10; children, Maria Anna, 1902-7, and Anna Justina, 1904.
- 1904 —Finished VI Symphony; first performance, Essen, 1906; published 1905.
- 1905 —Finished VII Symphony; first performance, Prague, 1908; published 1908.
- 1906-7—VIII Symphony, first performance, Munich, Sept. 12th, 1910; published 1910.
- 1907 —Conductor of operas and concerts in New York (Metropolitan Opera House).
- 1908 —Finished *Das Lied von der Erde*; first performance, Munich, November 1911 (Walter).  
Second season in New York; the Philharmonic Society.
- 1909 —Finished IX Symphony; first performance, June 1912, Vienna; published 1912.  
X Symphony (Unfinished); two movements performed at Prague, 1924.
- 1910 —Third season as conductor in America.
- 1911 —Death, May 18, Vienna; burial in cemetery at Grinzing (Vienna).