

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen
Weber Freiligrath Frey
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Lichtenberg Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer
Trackl Stevenson Lenz Hambrecht Doyle Gjellerup
Mommssen Thoma Tolstoi Hanrieder Droste-Hülshoff
Dach Thoma Verne Hägele Hauptmann Humboldt
Karrillon Reuter Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Melville Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy
Storm Casanova Lessing Langbein Gilm Gryphius
Chamberlain Schiller Lafontaine Iffland Sokrates
Brentano Strachwitz Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Schilling Kralik Gibbon Tschchow
Vulpius
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist Mörike Musil
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Kraus
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke
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Marx Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz
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**Parsifal A Mystical Drama By
Richard Wagner Retold In The
Spirit Of The Bayreuth
Interpretation**

Oliver Huckel

Imprint

This book is part of the TREDITION CLASSICS series.

Author: Oliver Huckel

Cover design: toepferschumann, Berlin (Germany)

Publisher: tredition GmbH, Hamburg (Germany)

ISBN: 978-3-8491-8497-1

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[Illustration]

Parsifal

**A MYSTICAL DRAMA BY RICHARD WAGNER RETOLD IN
THE SPIRIT OF THE BAYREUTH INTERPRETATION**

BY

Oliver Huckel

To my Wife

IN LOVING MEMORY OF BAYREUTH DAYS

O.H.

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ILLUSTRATED BY FRANZ STASSEN

FOREWORD

The Parsifal of Richard Wagner was not only the last and loftiest work of his genius, but it is also one of the few great dramas of modern times,—a drama which unfolds striking and impressive spiritual teachings. Indeed, Parsifal may be called Richard Wagner's great confession of faith. He takes the legend of the Holy Grail, and uses it to portray wonderfully and thrillingly the Christian truths of the beauty, the glory, and the inspiring power of the Lord's Supper, and the infinite meaning of the redeeming love of the Cross. He reveals in this drama by poetry and music, and with a marvellous breadth and depth of spiritual conception, this theme (in his own words): "The founder of the Christian religion was not wise: He was divine. To believe in Him is to imitate Him and to seek union with Him.... In consequence of His atoning death, everything which lives and breathes may know itself redeemed.... Only love rooted in sympathy and expressed in action to the point of a complete destruction of self-will, is Christian love." (Wagner's Letters, 1880, pages 270, 365, 339.)

The criticism has sometimes been made that the basic religious idea of Parsifal is Buddhistic rather than Christian; that it is taken directly from the philosophy of Schopenhauer, who was perhaps as nearly a Buddhist as was possible for an Occidental mind to be; that the dominating idea in Parsifal is compassion as the essence of sanctity, and that Wagner has merely clothed this fundamental Buddhistic idea with the externals of Christian form and symbolism. This criticism is ingenious. It may also suggest that all great religions in their essence have much which is akin. But no one who reads carefully Wagner's own letters during the time that he was brooding over his Parsifal can doubt that he was trying in this drama to express in broadest and deepest way the essentials of Christian truth. Christianity has no need to go to Buddhism to find such a

fundamental conception as that of an infinite compassion as a revelation of God.

The legend of the Grail, as Wagner uses it, has in it the usual accompaniments of mediaeval tradition,—something of paganism and magic. But these pagan elements are only contrasts to the purity and splendor of the simple Christian truth portrayed. The drama suggests the early miracle and mystery plays of the Christian Church; but more nearly, perhaps, it reminds one of those great religious dramas, scenic and musical, which were given at night at Eleusis, near Athens, in the temple of the Mysteries, before the initiated ones among the Greeks in the days of Pericles and Plato. Here at Bayreuth the mystic drama is given before its thousands of devout pilgrims and music-lovers who gather to the little town as to a sacred spot from all parts of the world,—from Russia, Italy, France, England, and America,—and who enter into the spirit of this noble drama and feast of music as if it were a religious festival in a temple of divine mysteries.

The sources of Wagner's story deserve a few words. The legend of the Holy Grail took many forms during the Middle Ages. It was told in slightly varying way in the twelfth century by the French writers Robert de Borron and Chrestien de Troyes, and in the early thirteenth century by Wolfram von Eschenbach in the strong German speech of Thuringia. The substance of these legends was that the precious cup, used for the wine at the Last Supper, and also used to receive the Saviour's blood at the Cross, was forever after cherished as the Holy Grail. It was carried from the Holy Land by Joseph of Arimathea and taken first to Gaul and later to Spain to a special sanctuary among the mountains, which was named Monsalvat. Here it was to be cherished and guarded by a holy band of Knights of the Grail. The same legend appears in the chronicles of Sir Thomas Malory, but instead of Gaul, early Britain is the place to which the Grail is brought. Tennyson's "The Holy Grail" in his *Idylls of the King* largely follows Sir Thomas Malory's chronicles. The American artist Edwin A. Abbey in his masterly paintings of the Grail legend as portrayed on the walls of the Boston Public Library, also follows Malory. Wagner, however, uses the version of Wolfram von Eschenbach, modifying it and spiritualizing it to suit his purposes. The German artist Franz Stassen, from whom our illustra-

tions are taken, has entered with perfect appreciation into Wagner's version of the noble legend. The following rendering of the Parsifal is not a close translation of the text, but rather a transfusion of the spirit. It is possibly as nearly a translation as Fitzgerald's rendition of Omar Khayyam, or Macpherson's version of the poems of Ossian. It is what may be called a free rendering, aiming to give the spirit rather than the language of the original.

The mere translations of the words of Parsifal, as given in the English texts of H. and F. Corder and M.H. Glyn, do not adequately represent the full value of the drama. Those versions were under the necessity of a strictly literal translation, which was further hampered in order to make the English words fit the music, and the result was far from satisfactory. The literal translation also unfortunately over-emphasizes certain parts and phrases in the drama which are somewhat harsh, but which at Bayreuth become much modified and refined, and are, therefore, so represented in this version.

The present telling of the story will be found to use all that Wagner has given in the words, but with the addition here and thereof interpretative phrases, suggested by the drama itself at Bayreuth. Its purpose is to give an interpretation, a *cumulative impression*, the spirit of the words, music, and mystic meaning, blended together into one story and picture. It is made after a very careful study of the German text of Wagner for essential meanings, and after an appreciative hearing of the great drama itself, on two occasions, at Bayreuth. We present it in the form in which such sacred legends seem to find their most natural English setting,—in the form made classic in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*.

It may also be interesting to note that the present version was planned ten years ago on a first visit to Bayreuth. Critical work on the German text and in the literature of the Parsifal legends was done later during two years at the universities of Berlin and Oxford. But the actual work of this translation and interpretation was done in the summer of 1902 at Bayreuth, and in part at Nuremberg and Munich. It may also be stated that this version is issued with the kind permission of Messrs. Schott and Company of London, the owners of the copyright of Wagner's words and music.

The music of Parsifal has been so often described and analyzed in critical papers that it is not necessary here to speak of it in detail. This word, however, may be in place. The marvellous music at Bayreuth helped in every way in the interpretation of the drama. Every part and phase of the thought and movement were brought forth in the various musical motives, adding emphasis and beauty and intensity of feeling. Now the music would whisper of the wondrous grace of the holy sacrament, or of the sweet beauty of God's world, clothed in the radiance of Good Friday; now it would reveal the sorrows of the gentle Herzeleide, or the awful anguish of Amfortas, or the deep rumblings of Klingsor's black art, or the fascinating music of the flower-maidens. Often came the pure tones that told of the guileless One, or the strong chords of mighty faith, or the ebb and swell of mystic bells, or the glory of the sacred Spear. Now came the regal blasts for Parsifal, and often and through it all, the splendid music of the Grail itself. The music was like a fragrant atmosphere to the drama, softening and refining what was harsh, giving a needed stress here and there, and investing the whole story with a subtle and uplifting charm.

The drama of Parsifal teaches its own great lessons of life. Yet one or two suggestions of interpretation may not be amiss, for it is confessedly one of the most mystical of modern dramas. It may perchance be considered as representing the strife between paganism and Christianity in the early centuries of the Church,—the powers of magic and the hot passions of the human heart contending against the advancing power of Christian truth and the victorious might of Purity as portrayed in the guileless hero. Or it may be considered as representing in a mystic legend the spiritual history of Christ coming in later presence among the sons of men and imaged in the mystic Parsifal. Wagner mentions that this Scripture was often in his mind when writing Parsifal—"Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? The foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men." Or this, further, it may represent, in striking and inspiring way,—that the pure in heart shall win the victories in life; that the guileless are the valiant sons of God; that the heart that resists evil passion and is touched by pity for the world's woe is the heart that reincarnates the

passionate purity of the Christ and can reveal again the healing power, the Holy Grail of God.

Those who desire to study further the mystical and spiritual meanings will find much helpful suggestion in such books as *The Argument and Mystery of Parsifal*, by Charles T. Gatty, F.S.A. (London); *A Study of Parsifal*, by Alfred Gurney, M.A. (London); *Parsifal,—the Finding of Christ through Art*, by A.R. Parsons (New York); or *My Musical Memories*, by Rev. H.R. Haweis (chapter on "Parsifal").

It may be some time before the real Parsifal as given at Bayreuth is fully appreciated by the English-speaking public, although shortly the special conditions which have hitherto reserved its production to Bayreuth alone will be released, and the great drama will be heard in other musical centres. This version is intended to be a vivid reminder of the drama to those who have seen it at Bayreuth, and also to give to those who have not seen it a fuller glimpse of the majestic story than has hitherto been possible to find in English. The genius of Wagner as a musician has so far overshadowed all else, that his genius as a poet and as an exquisite reteller of the old legends has not been fully appreciated.

Galahad, as Tennyson portrays him, will always hold the first place with English readers as the ideal knight of the Holy Grail. The matchless diction of Tennyson has given the less perfect form of the legend a supreme charm and beauty. But Wolfram von Eschenbach's Parsifal, as spiritualized and humanized in Wagner's lyric drama, will be seen to be in fuller accord with the whole cycle and development of the Grail legends, and at the same time gives the nobler story. It is a consummate parable of the contending passions and the heavenly aspiration, the ineffable pity and the mystic glory, of the human heart. It portrays an intensely human and heroic life, imaginatively identified with that of the very Christ.

"However mediaeval the language and symbolism of Parsifal may be," says a modern critic, "one cannot but acknowledge the simplicity and power of the story. Its spiritual significance is universal. Whatever more it may mean, we see clearly that the guileless knight is Purity, Kundry is the Wickedness of the world expressed in its most enticing form, and King Amfortas suffering with his

open wound is Humanity. One cannot read the drama without a thrill, without a clutching at the heart, at its marvellous meaning, its uplifting and ennobling lessons."

O.H.

Baltimore, Maryland, January 7th, 1903.