

# Humperdinck Is Opposed to Sin as an Opera Motif

### German Composer, Now Here to Produce His New Work "Die Koenigskinder," Is An Optimist and Prefers Music "Like a Normal Man's Emotions," Full of Color, Life and Melody.

It seems an anomaly that the composer of gnome and fairy operas should have come from the land where those small folk abound to a country which is accused of having neither fairies nor any belief in them, and should have come here for the purpose of giving the premiere of his latest fairy work. Yet so it is. Herr Professor Engelbert Humperdinck entered the Hotel Astor in dignified leisure the other day and was escorted to the red sitting room to grant a private interview to a Tribune representative on the subject of—well, an intricate subject—himself.

Interviewing is not an art or a pastime that is heavily indulged in in Germany and the professor felt as though there were too much of the element of a public tribute in being sought out thus. After saying which it is unnecessary further to explain that Herr Humperdinck is extraordinarily modest. In proof of which when he was congratulated later about the way in which his Christmas carols, recently written, had been received in Germany he shook his head and raised his hands.

"No sweet chocolate talk about myself," he protested. "I hope they will be liked here, that is all."

Taking the fact of his extreme quietness together with his closely watchful eyes, half humorous, half sympathetic, it is pretty safe to put the professor down as one of the world's optimists. Another sign is that he never says he is and would not admit it if you accused him of it.

"What sort of themes, Herr Professor, do you prefer to work over?" was asked.

"Nice themes," he said reminiscently, as though talking to himself. "I am interested in nearly everything, of course, but the most usual things about life that are at the same time the least obvious—do you know my meaning? Such things I like to write music for. I have been most successful with my writings about children, because one can be simple with children. Sin is not my motif. It has been the motif of many operas, perhaps most operas, the Italian particularly. I take pleasure in hearing them all, but do not like to involve myself for months at a time in the composition of music that is a running accompaniment to murder, the falseness of men and women and to evil of all kinds. Such occurrences are human enough and happen in many lives, but fortunately are not on the daily programme. It is not that I like to describe in music a man's daily deeds. It is the changing panorama of his thoughts and feelings, full of wonder and subtle meaning at all times, even though the monotone of an uneventful life."

"In my experience tragedy is only the occasional note usually occurring in a man's thoughts at some time when not-

ing tragic has happened to him. When enveloped in the black of some tragedy that has happened man does not think at all. He is numb. But his daily emotions are controlled and are full of color and melody, of imagination and of hope. To create this state of mind in music gives one a vast and subtle field. All of this, of course, can be thrown against a background of myth, or legend, fairies, gnomes or what you like. I mean the story of the opera can be wholly fanciful so long as the people and their moods and feelings are wholly human."

It is easy to see why Humperdinck is called in Germany "the modern Wagner."

"In composing," he went on, "I prefer the major to the minor note. That is, not only in the musical sense, but in the philosophical. I prefer realism to heroics and an upward rather than a downward pull in the mood I create."

"In the German folksongs there is much good material for the composer. In them one can get close to the heart of the people and can understand their impulses. Folksongs have great dramatic value, too. They are very picturesque, often full of but little known historic lore and suggest good stage settings."

"I used some in 'Die Koenigskinder,' my new opera which I have come over to produce. But many little airs and themes in this work that sound like folksongs are not genuine ones, but are my own composition. I cannot work with folk music much without wanting to compose some of it myself and I have made numbers of songs. They come to me as an expression of some conditions of life."

"You cannot guess my enthusiasm for Shakespeare. He has much of the folk richness in his plays. I have read every one and have written incidental music to 'The Midsummer Night's Dream,' 'As You Like It,' 'The Merchant of Venice' and others. Also I have composed to many of his little songs that occur in the plays. The words are delightful and wholly suggestive of music. I cannot read them without feeling myself swing right into simple harmonies."

"Do you think Shakespeare the greatest of all dramatic writers?"

"Yes, the greatest of all time. No one has ever written so deeply."

At this moment Frau Professor Humperdinck came in, with cheeks red from the wind.

"You speak of Shakespeare," she inquired. "Acht! he has read every one of those plays, and in English! And do you believe it, so have I. Almost every German knows a good deal of Shakespeare, though. It is a national habit. I believe we appreciate him more than the English or the Americans."

"He has accomplished in drama," said the professor, picking up the thread

where he left it himself when his frau had come in, "what the composer should try to accomplish in opera. He is entirely real against a background of imagination."

After which novel comparison of Shakespeare's work with the art of the music drama, Herr Humperdinck refused to reveal anything further of his opinions or to talk any more about himself. The characteristic German interest in the face across the table took pos-



THE SCENERY SET FOR THE SECOND ACT OF "DIE KOENIGSKINDER." It represents a bit of the little city where the King's son is living as a beggar. Through the open gates of the city wall the goose girl enters, to be hailed by the disguised prince as his queen.

session of him and the interviewer became perforce the "interviewee."

"Who are you? What is your work?"

"I have been in Germany? When? Where? Go on again!" A flood of questions had poured from him before he could be stumped.

"Acht!" he laughed. "You do not like, then, to be interviewed. But I find it far more amusing than to talk about myself."

Herr Humperdinck, although a man of fifty-six, seems to have an increasing store of vigor as time goes on. He is



HERR PROFESSOR ENGELBERT HUMPERDINCK Has recently come to America to superintend the production of his latest opera, "Die Koenigskinder." In 1896 Herr Humperdinck was created "Professor" by Kaiser Wilhelm II in recognition of his achievements in music.

tall, erect and robust, with a heavy gray beard and mustache, a high color and blue eyes that smile under shaggy gray eyebrows. His whole manner is extremely quiet, keenly observant and good humored. The erratic, fiery tempered

demon of music that tortures most of those who dare to compose great music either has spared this conjuror of faeries, or else he keeps it hidden down behind his beard somewhere beyond sight. His gentle manner and soft accent

As the Tribune representative rose to take his leave he glanced once more about the apartment. With all his keen insight into human nature and his ability as a psychologist, Mr. Belasco is over the dreamer. One corner of his studio is devoted to relics of the great Napoleon. Most of them are housed in a beautiful rosewood cabinet. Statuettes of the Emperor, autographed letters, medallions, mementos of his campaigns—he tends them with loving care. And in strange contrast

he has another collection, almost equally prominent, a collection of black cats—black cats in every clime, in the banisters, black cats as penwipers and as pin-cushions and black cats also in the flesh. A remarkable man is David Belasco, whose sympathies extend everywhere, from the most practical details of stage craft to the collection of antiques and mementos of the great French warrior. Perhaps even his sympathy for black cats will be understood by those who look a little beyond the bright lights of Broadway.

## Operatic Acting Should Be Humanized, Says Belasco

### Dramatist Thinks Puccini Has Helped Toward This End By Representing Real Life in "The Girl."

To begin with, it was in fairyland—a fairyland of strange and beautiful things, of faded tapestries intricate in design, of stands of ancient armor, of walls lined with volumes bound in vellum and crushed velvet. And at the gloriously carved desk of ebony, his fingers toying with a little silver paper knife, sat the man himself, the savant who had brought these beautiful things together. David Belasco at first view has much of the Catholic priest in his appearance. He wears the clerical collar, his manner is quiet, polished, always courteous. When he speaks it is rare that he raises his voice, his tones come as if from somewhere far beyond. The education that he received from the Catholic father in the wilds of Vancouver Island has never been forgotten. In the exquisite taste of his workroom, in the quiet courtesy of his demeanor, the mellowness that is the result of the training given by the Jesuits shows itself unmistakably.

And, strange to say, the fairyland was in West 44th street, under the eaves of the Belasco Theatre, yet in atmosphere it might have been ten thousand miles away from the garish white of the Tenderloin. It was here that the Tribune representative sat and talked with Mr. Belasco over the work that for the last three weeks has been occupying him body and soul—the production at the Metropolitan Opera House of Giacomo Puccini's latest opera, "The Girl of the Golden West."

Night and day Mr. Belasco has been attending rehearsals of the opera, drilling the European singers in the impersonation of cowboys, Indians and pioneer women. No light task indeed, yet those who witnessed the first performances of the opera could scarcely believe that to these same singers a bare three weeks before the idea of a cowboy was about as vague as that of the North Pole to Dr. Cook.

"You know," said Mr. Belasco, "that when the rehearsals of 'The Girl' began I had no idea really of staging the work. Of course, I was interested in it; Mr. Puccini had founded it upon my play, but I had no idea of going into the production heart and soul. Then I went up to the rehearsal room and in five minutes I was lost. I simply couldn't get away from the rehearsals. I went to them night and day. I even gave up the rehearsals of my latest play. It was the first opera by a composer of the first rank written on an American theme and produced here in America, and my patriotic instincts that whatever I could do toward making it a success must be done."

"Did you find the singers hard to train?" asked the interviewer.

"Not in the least," was the quick reply. "Easier even than any native actors. It seems to me that men and women simply become what they happen to be opera singers. I have been told that this precludes their acting. Yet I found Miss Destina, Mr. Caruso, Mr. Amato, Mr. Gilly, even the individual members of the chorus, remarkably quick in learning. They were all, so to start with, thinkers, men and women who had devoted years to study. Even the chorus were different from the average stage mob. Each member of it hoped at some time to become a principal, and the intelligence and energy that pressed them forward there helped them marvelously in their acting."

"Few of the singers could speak English,

piece, and so was Mr. Caruso's dashing highwayman and Mr. Amato's darkly sinister and repressed Jack Rance. And who can forget Mr. Gilly's delightful swaggar?

They are great artists, all of them. "To my mind it means simply this: Men and women, after all, are deep down in their souls neither French, nor Italians, nor Bohemians, nor Germans, but simply human beings, made out of the same clay as the rest of us. Give them a chance to think, show them what is expected of them and they will respond to it."

"Operatic acting in the past has been too much a thing of tradition. When an opera was first produced some stage manager put down the exact 'business' to be followed, and that 'business' too often has been followed ever since. Yet how unnatural this acting now seems to us. It surely has no relation to anything on earth! Mr. Puccini has realized this, and has tried to harmonize his characters."

"To humanize acting," Mr. Belasco's voice dropped to a lower key, and his eyes looked far away into the distance; "this, it seems to me, should be the tendency of the modern operatic stage. It has been the tendency of the drama. The days of the grand style are passed. Actors and actresses must now deport themselves like human beings, and not like puppets who have been trained by rote. There is now a

greater simplicity, a truer naturalness. It is the cry of 'back to nature.'"

"So, too, must be the tendency of operatic acting. Singers must sing to each other, and not to the audience. They must study not only the music but the characters they impersonate. They must become, and are becoming, more human. Of course, operatic acting presents difficulties that are not met with on the dramatic stage. A singer must act to the music, to the beat. It is impossible to obtain the subtle effects reached by dramatic actors. Acting in opera must be in a slightly broader style. A singer cannot pause in his action simply because it seems to him effective. He must regard the music. Yet despite this, I believe that operatic acting can be greatly humanized."

"Take two specific cases in 'The Girl.' Mr. Caruso's climb up the ladder after he has been shot, is a splendid piece of acting, and a most difficult one, one that any actor might well be proud of. And then Miss Destina's handling of the scene where Rance tries to kiss her, where she struggles with him and, finally breaking away from him, rushes to the bar and seizing a bottle, threatens to beat him—it is a splendid and most natural piece of acting, yet she does it all to the music, and never misses a beat. All this simply shows that it is perfectly possible for opera to be hu-



DAVID BELASCO IN HIS STUDY AT WORK ON A NEW PRODUCTION. (Copyright by David Belasco)

manized in its acting." "And how, Mr. Belasco," asked his caller, "did Signor Puccini come to be interested in your work as suitable material for his music?" "You know that several years ago I produced 'Madame Butterfly,' which I had made into a play from John Luther Long's story, in London. Mr. Puccini saw it there and at once asked permission to use it for an opera. Every one now knows of the success of 'Madame Butterfly.' Four years ago, when 'The Girl of the Golden West' was being played at the Academy of Music, Mr. Puccini came to see me on the stage after the first act and told me that he liked it immensely. He returned after the second act and cried: 'I'll take it! I can already hear the music for some of the scenes.' "So that was the operatic birth of 'The Girl.'"

## Rum and the Next War

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the most enlightened and sensible sovereigns of the eighteenth century, went so far as to denounce and penalize temperance.

Thus, in 1779, he issued a proclamation over his signature deploring "the increased consumption of coffee by my subjects, and the amount of money that goes out of the country in consequence thereof. Everybody is using coffee. This must no longer be. My subjects must shall drink beer. I have been brought up on beer. So were my ancestors. Innumerable battles have been fought and won by Prussian soldiers nourished on beer, and I do not believe that coffee drinking soldiers can be depended upon to endure hardships, or to conquer our enemies, should another war occur." Indeed, the King actually forbade the importation of the coffee berry, and appointed a corps of official coffee sniffers, whose duty it was to nose out all those engaged in the roasting and sale of coffee and to land them in jail. "This had the desired effect, and coffee was ousted from popular favor in Prussia, until after the Napoleonic wars.

Among the virtues which Queen Christina of Spain instilled into the mind of her son, King Alfonso, is that of temperance, and he is a total abstainer. It is not alone a matter of principle with him, but also of taste; for he dislikes all wines and spirits and drinks enormous quantities of ice water.

King Ferdinand of Bulgaria is also a total abstainer; not as a matter of principle or of health, but of policy, pure and simple. In forswearing beer, wine, liquors and stimulants of every kind he acted on the advice of his wonderfully

clever mother and principal political adviser, the late Princess Clementine of Coburg, of whom it used to be said that she was far and away the shrewdest diplomat in Europe. His abstemiousness has proved of inestimable help to self-restraint in arguments with ministers and others and in the maintenance of a phenomenal evenness of temper. Thanks to his abstinence, his nerves are always under the most perfect control, and the fact that he never loses patience or temper, never displays even signs of irritation under the most trying circumstances and intense provocation, gives him a tremendous advantage in his dealings with the passionate, hot-tempered and intemperate races of Southern Europe, among whom he has cast his lot.

Queen Wilhelmina of Holland, her mother, Queen Emma; the two queens of Sweden and the King of Italy are also total abstainers, while the present Czar has always been noted for his abstemiousness that is foreign to the character of his countrymen and to the reputation of the members of the imperial house of Romanoff. Emperor Francis Joseph owes the wonderful retention of his mental and bodily vigor, in his eightieth year and after an eventful reign of more than half a century, to his sparing use of stimulants, and of course the use of Turkey, in obedience to the commands of the Koran, dispenses with the use of alcohol. This is the condition of affairs in the first decade of the twentieth century. Yet a hundred years ago there was not a monarch in the Old World who did not think it necessary to go to bed drunk.

In conclusion, it may be said that it was in Germany that temperance organizations had their birth.

EX-ATTACHE.

## Mme. Bernhardt

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my life, and I find that even such terribly trying roles as that I play in Sardou's "La Tosca" do not fatigue me as they once did.

"To her who would keep young who would look young, and what is a great deal more important, would feel young when she has reached sixty-seven, I give one great commandment: Find an interest in life and, keeping that interest before you as the main thing in your life, secure other interests that may not become mentally warped."

"The mind, I think, controls the body more than the body can control the mind."

"With fads of beauty culture and all that sort of thing I have little sympathy. I still feel myself young. When it pleases God to bring me to that point where I no longer feel young, I shall accept my fate with a courage as strong as that with which I met the many rebuffs which befell me at the outset of my career."

"I have one ample principle of diet which I have followed all my life, and which I strongly recommend to every one else. Eat what you like and when you like. I, have served me well."

"Worry, the fretting over trifles, I have never indulged in. The worries that prevent themselves to us in the form of great calamities can be avoided by none of us, but the petty worries of life, such as a thousand victims to one who is destroyed by the news of some really tragic event."

Bernhardt, upon being besought to deliver a message to American women, leaned back in her chair and said: "Tell them to work! To throw themselves into whatever they do. If it is business, let business be their big specialty. If they marry let them be sociality (toute femme) to their husbands. Let their watchwords be loyalty, enthusiasm, devotion."

In spite of her ceaseless endeavor Bernhardt still has her graces, her pleasures, else why in her dressing room at the theatre now hung with fresh violet like a lover of Adonis? It is merely a sign of life, all sides of which this great woman loves.