NIETZSCHE AND BIZET

By JOHN W. KLEIN

"THINK what we miss in Wagner," exclaims Nietzsche in his pamphlet "The Case of Wagner": "la gaya scienza, light feet, wit, fire, grave, grand logic, the exultant spirituality, the vibrating light of the South, the smooth sea, perfect symmetry."

Frau Förster-Nietzsche repeatedly declares that her brother longed for music full of happiness, pride, high spirits, power, and yet held within bounds by the highest laws of style. His bitter experience with Wagner's art of "glorified unrestraint" had, however, robbed him of all joy in his favourite recreation. Since the Bayreuth Festival in 1876, he had begun by ruthlessly forbidding himself all romantic music calculated to exercise a morbid and depressing influence on his mind and to provide a fertile soil for every kind of yearning and spongy sensuality. He, indeed, feared that if he abandoned himself for one moment to his overwhelming delight in sound he would be instantly recaptured by the magic of the Wagnerian art, and we are accordingly not surprised to learn that he considered himself obliged to forgo the reading of music and the playing of the piano once for all. Nevertheless, in secret he yet longed for the coming of a musician bold, subtle, malignant, southern, healthy enough to take an immortal revenge on that other music—"that Wagnerian music which is all the rage nowadays."

It was on November 27th, 1881, that Nietzsche strolled into the Politeama Theatre at Genoa and saw "Carmen" for the first time. He was captivated and ecstatically proclaimed that he had at last experienced the incomparable sensation of recognising his ideal and his goal for the first time. In this keen, transparent, highly electrified atmosphere he fancied he enjoyed once more his entire power and he was suddenly fired with the hope of health and the intoxication of recovery, feeling, indeed, as "tempestuous and ardent" under the influence of this bold and bracing music as under that of the glorious South wind itself.

"The day before yesterday," he writes to his sister, "I heard 'Carmen,' an opera by a Frenchman named Bizet, and was thunderstruck! So strong, so impassioned, so graceful, so Southern!" He, moreover, hastened to acquaint his most intimate friend Peter

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Gast with his sensational discovery. "Hurrah, friend! A happy find! An opera, 'Carmen,' by Georges Bizet. It sounded like a story by Mérimée—enchanting, strong, here and there staggering. A true French talent and one not led astray by Wagner. I thought something of the kind might yet be possible!" he exclaims with a cry of triumph. "It looks as if the French were on the road to better things in dramatic music, and they are far ahead of the Germans in one important respect; passion with them is not such a far-fetched thing (as all passion is with Wagner)."

The delighted philosopher concluded his letter with the words: "Bizet? Who is he?" How strange that he was not even aware that the hapless composer of "Carmen" had sunk unnoticed into an early grave more than six years previously! At any rate, this finally disposes of the legend that his acquaintance with Bizet's masterpiece was the immediate cause of the final breach with Wagner which had already occurred in 1878.

"I was very ill, but I am well again, thanks to 'Carmen,'" exclaims the delighted philosopher ecstatically. The South is, indeed, a great school of healing, and at this period he was in the very best of health, roaming about the mountains in transports of joy singing José's "gloriously naïve" song "Who goes there? Dragoon of Alcalá." Bizet's music awakened in him a feeling of exuberant freedom, as if he stood on tiptoe, and was compelled to dance from sheer inward delight. Most of the inspiration for his favourite work, the delightful "La Gaya Scienza," came to him during these days, and the dead Bizet is gratefully and reverently addressed as "The Musician of the Future," the creator of "La Gaya Scienza."

Five days after the first performance he heard Bizet's masterpiece a second time and wrote yet another enthusiastic letter to Gast, who was no less delighted than his illustrious friend with Bizet's truly marvellous power of idealising quite commonplace things. "What a great blow it is to me," cries the philosopher, "to hear that Bizet, from whom I had hoped so much, is dead! I have heard his 'Carmen' for the second time! It is the very soul of passion and seduction. In my opinion this work is worth a whole journey to Spain—a Southern work in the highest degree! Do not laugh, old friend, I do not so easily make an utter mistake in taste! I am, indeed, not far from thinking this is the best opera at present existing; so long as we live it will form an item in every European repertoire."

After this prophetic statement, he proceeds to speak of the libretto, which he forthwith pronounces to be "wonderfully good,"

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to the great disgust of many modern critics, who are in the habit of stigmatising it—and not entirely unjustifiably—as "a grotesque display of absurdities" miraculously transfigured by the composer's art.

At this period Nietzsche no longer corresponded with Wagner and, indeed, the embittered master of Bayreuth sovereignly proclaimed that his former disciple was a thoroughly unreliable and untruthful person who had wantonly sacrificed an old friendship for an unhealthy need of self-advertisement. On the other hand, the philosopher was never weary of asserting that the nerve-destroying power of Wagner's decadent music had completely ruined his health and that it had taken him almost six years to recover from the staggering blow. Nevertheless, he did not venture to proclaim his views until after the death of the master of Bayreuth, though he confidently believed he had at last succeeded in discovering a man of genius capable of permanently supplanting Wagner in his esteem.

The year 1881 witnessed the complete triumph of Bizet's masterpiece. It would be extremely interesting to know whether Wagner was ever present at a performance of "Carmen." It is not a little doubtful, as even his fanatical admirer Seroff declares that he took no interest whatever in the works of other composers. Nevertheless, we cannot entirely overlook Hans von Bülow's explicit statement to the effect that Wagner shared Brahms' enthusiasm for "Carmen." However, since Bülow had informed Nietzsche that he no longer corresponded with Wagner and that he was not even acquainted with his later music, it is not absolutely out of the question that the famous conductor (whose favourite opera and "darling of his heart" was "Carmen") slightly exaggerated Wagner's admiration for Bizet's masterpiece. At any rate, the master of Bayreuth announced with sublime fatuity that he considered Saint-Saëns the greatest French composer of his age.

In the meantime, in 1881, the number of performances of "Carmen" greatly exceeded that of all the works of Weber and Wagner, and the latter, who—during the last years of his life—had been making considerable bids for popularity, can scarcely have viewed his French rival's success with equanimity—a success, moreover, considerably enhanced by the enthusiastic approval of the old Kaiser William I, who had no liking for Wagner's works and whose very marked and outspoken preference for "Carmen" had already bitterly exasperated Wagner on the occasion of the Bayreuth Festival.

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In January, 1882, "the most beautiful month of January that I have ever spent," Nietzsche forwarded the piano score of "Carmen" to Gast, with the remark: "I have ventured to write in it a few marginal notes and rely entirely on your humanity and musicalness. In short, perhaps I am providing you with an excellent opportunity of holding me up to ridicule. The discovery of 'Carmen' was, indeed, the event of my winter, truly a gift from Heaven; and Genoa is infinitely dearer to me on account of this opera."

These marginal notes have provoked a considerable amount of discussion. Dr. Hugo Daffner is perhaps somewhat inclined to overrate their value, but on the whole they prove Nietzsche a musical critic of rare discernment and, moreover, give us a truly unique opportunity of penetrating into his mind.

Few men were, indeed, more sensitive to the subtlest nuances of musical expression; none—with the possible exception of Stendhal—has ever been blessed with an æsthetic and musical education of such extraordinary comprehensiveness. But though we are repeatedly struck by the justice of his views, there are occasional remarks somewhat lacking in penetration and discrimination. Nietzsche, for instance, fancied that Bizet had originally written an overture in strict accordance with the traditional rules, but that owing to the excessive length of the work he had been compelled to substitute the present prelude with its "magnificent circus noise." To contrast the sinister Carmen motif with the unrestrained gaiety of a national festivity was, however, a stroke of genius on the part of Bizet, and, indeed, in these two themes the essence of the drama is wholly exhausted; in the one the intoxicating joy of mere living, in the other sombre fatalism. There is certainly no reason to believe that Bizet would have undertaken a task from which he always shrank with the utmost repugnance. His only elaborate overture, "La Patrie," scarcely reveals the hand of a master and is, moreover, singularly lacking in Bizet's habitual delicacy and originality. Significatively enough, it was—during the composer's lifetime—the most successful of his works.

On the other hand, when Nietzsche writes of the tragic Carmen motif that it is "an epigram on passion, the very best thing that has been written on this subject since Stendhal," he is undeniably singularly acute and far-sighted, for there is a very striking relationship—hitherto unsuspected—between Bizet and Stendhal. The mind of the composer of "Carmen" was certainly more akin to the fine, subtle, intoxicating spirit of Henri Beyle than to that

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of Prosper Mérimée. The inexpressibly fascinating and tantalizing personality of Mathilde de la Mole in "Le Rouge et le Noir" (which Taine read no less than eighty-two times) inevitably reminds us of Bizet's Carmen, an infinitely more captivating creature than Mérimée's vulgar pickpocket. The Carmen of Bizet, the proud and fearless gitana capable occasionally, however, of deep feeling—witness the glorious duet with Escamillo in the last act—has, indeed, remarkably little in common with the contemptible—though perfectly delineated—vagabond of Mérimée's portraiture. I can imagine with a thrill of delight how Stendhal would have exulted in her! Indeed, his conception of love was closely akin to that of Bizet as revealed in "Carmen" and as defined by Nietzsche in the following words: "Love translated back into nature; love as fate, as a fatality, cynical, innocent, cruel—and precisely in this way nature. The love whose means is war, whose very essence is the mortal hatred between the sexes. Such a conception of love (the only one worthy of a philosopher) is rare; it distinguishes one work from among a thousand others." On the other hand, Bizet scarcely seems to have been acquainted with the works of Stendhal (whom it required two generations to understand), and one may perhaps be occasionally tempted to wonder whether the composer of "Djamileh" and the creator of Micaëla—who was in no sense a woman-hater such as Nietzsche or Strindberg—would have been particularly edified with the latter's rather trenchant and provocative interpretation of his work.

The chorus of the cigarette girls particularly awakened Nietzsche's admiration. Its exquisite charm and gorgeous colouring seemed to him to scintillate with all the quivering splendour of refined beauty. "It wafts to me a breath from the gardens of Epicurus. Only consider," he exclaims, "how much is idealised in this scene!" And in "La Gaya Scienza" he is still more explicit with regard to the quality Bizet shares with Epicurus. "Never previously," he declares, "was there such a moderation of voluptuousness." Bizet is, indeed, inimitable in the way in which he avoids vulgarity, and we need only compare the matchless grace of this scene with the sultry sensuality of the modern Italian veristic composers to realize the profound truth of Nietzsche's penetrating observation.

The Habanera particularly filled him with delight. "Eros," he remarks, "as conceived by the ancients, playfully alluring, mischievously demoniacal. A veritable witch is necessary for this performance. I know of nothing to be compared with this

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song. It must be sung in Italian, not in German." (And we may add, not in English.) Nietzsche, indeed, believed that the Germans had no fingers for delicate nuances, and certainly only the most mocking and captivating beauty coupled with the most extraordinary subtlety of expression can be considered adequate to a worthy interpretation of this triumph of harmonic and rhythmical devices.

Anyone in the least acquainted with Nietzsche's mentality will be fully prepared for the none too friendly reception awaiting the gentle Micaëla at the hands of the austere creator of "Zarathustra." With regard to her duet with Don José he contemptuously remarks: "It is beneath my notice," and he was probably thinking of the *fortissimo* passage for the two voices in unison when he adds: "It is too sentimental, too 'tannhäuserhaft.' Nevertheless," he concludes roguishly, "the 'harp-melody'" (the passage marked "poco meno mosso espressivo": "Tell him that his mother still fondly thinks of him") is exactly what Wolfram von Eschenbach wished to sing in praise of love, but he was, of course, unable to recollect the tune and had to content himself with expressing his longing for it." Indeed, Nietzsche is never weary of scoffing at Wagner, and his "extinct, although not altogether forgotten 'Tannhäuser,' " exclaiming on one occasion with regard to the quarrel of the cigarette girls: "How simple! For God's sake, just think what R. W. would have made of it!" Bizet, indeed—witness "L'Arlésienne"—consistently obeyed the French law of style which demands the maximum of expressiveness with the minimum of means.

Strange to say, the very man who was capable of treating the gentle Micaëla with such contemptuous harshness was inordinately fond of the Toreador song, which Bizet himself had stigmatised as "ordure." "It could not be more characteristic," he exclaims, and with regard to the popular refrain, he cries: "How often have I heard it sung at night in the streets of Genoa. It has passed into the blood of the Genoese; into mine also."

The incomparable grace of the smuggler quintet—which he was particularly fond of calling "la Tarantella"—filled him with indescribable delight, whilst the exquisitely roguish scene in which Dancaïro and Remendado chaff Carmen for her love affair with Don José, brought tears of laughter to his eyes. At no other moment does Bizet, indeed, give better proof of his prodigious cleverness, intelligence and wit, and no one can help admiring the composer's technical knowledge and skill in orchestration. Nietzsche was certainly one of the first to observe that wit was at last

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becoming possible in music, and there are no more striking instances of this sudden transformation of the Comic Muse than Dancaïro and Remendado's chaffing at Carmen and subsequently at the captive officer.

The melody of Carmen's dance is to him the ideal of all castanet music. "How soothing is this Moorish dancing," he exclaims in "The Case of Wagner." "How for once even our insatiability gets sated by its lascivious melancholy." The exquisitely chaste, yet passionate flower song impresses him as "inexpressibly tender and idealistic and not sentimental" (another dig at the José-Micaëla duet), whilst José's declaration of love he considers "beautiful and weirdly thrilling," remarking with singular acuteness and felicity that nothing similar is to be met with in any Italian opera, which he affirms "knows only the choruses of domestics or soldiers." (Nietzsche was not acquainted with Verdi's "Otello"!)

We cannot, however, agree with him that the elaborate finale of the second act has a military touch. Military touch, indeed! On the contrary, it is undisciplined—even rhapsodical in the extreme, yet—as Nietzsche instantly recognises—"a model finale." "We certainly do not feel one bit as happy in the wood with Schiller's robbers," he exclaims, with a sly dig at Germany's greatest dramatist, "the Moral-Trumpeter of Säkkingen," one of the pet objects of his aversion.

The exquisite prelude to the third act he rightly considers "a little masterpiece of good music," and, indeed, its refined delicacy is seldom sufficiently appreciated in the theatre. As a matter of fact, it is essentially anti-theatrical at heart and undeniably of too intimate a nature for the purpose of entr'acte music. Whenever I have heard it played to the accompaniment of the usual entr'acte din, I have invariably called to mind Berlioz' bitter declaration, "The theatre is the disorderly house of music and the chaste muse we drag there cannot enter without shuddering."

The card trio was always one of Nietzsche's favourite numbers. How he delighted in the Mozartian charm of the delightful little melody so marvellously suggestive of the thoughtless merriment of Frasquita and Mercédes, in the delicate shudder which its light footfall caused to pervade his whole body and limbs! And the terrible contrast, Carmen's fatalistic music, so profound and poignant, is in his opinion "very sombre, yet pleasant," and the passage "the cards no pity show" is "thrilling and terrible." After this Micaëla's song, a *hors d'œuvre* artificially introduced into the drama, is merely "somewhat sentimental, though interesting from

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a rhythmical point of view." Even the grand finale—with its marvellously effective contrasts—leaves him comparatively cold. He, indeed, always considered that the recourse to drama (in the conventional sense of the word) inevitably results in the sacrifice of music to scenic effect and betrays that the artist is much more of a master in tricky means than in genuine ones.

What, however, delighted Nietzsche most of all was the truly electrifying prelude to the fourth act. Words absolutely fail to convey the extent of his exultation. "Ah, how the heart beats!" he cries. "How escape from the terrible obsession of the inevitable! There is Genoese blood in it! It is the fever of passion exulting in the approach of death! And how wonderfully orchestrated it is! Every time I hear the *fortissimo* introduction of the second theme, my eyes fill with tears." And on another occasion he writes: "You ought to hear the death-like silence that reigns when the Genoese listen to their favourite piece, the prelude to the fourth act, and the yells for an encore that follow!" And it is this undeniable proof of Bizet's genius that pedants have ventured to qualify as "lamentably inadequate," and "a truly slipshod manner of dealing with an essentially dramatic situation." They would presumably have preferred something after the fashion of the prelude to the last act of "Madame Butterfly."

The wonderful duet between Carmen and Escamillo—habitually ignored by a restless public already busily engaged in feverish preparations for a speedy departure a couple of minutes before the fall of the curtain—awakens Nietzsche's enthusiasm in the highest degree. To him Bizet sung as the bird sings, out of innermost compulsion, and we are not surprised to hear him exclaim with gentle reverence: "Inexpressibly poignant, a heavenly simplicity of invention." The duettino—with Carmen's only love melody—might, indeed, quite aptly be described as "sublimated Gounod," and though we may occasionally be tempted to consider it psychologically untenable, we must all admit that it is musically a miracle of beauty and a joy for ever and that Mozart himself never composed anything lovelier.

Finally, Nietzsche considered the last scene "a dramatic masterpiece—to study for climax, contrast, logic." The characters of the pair are, indeed, wonderfully indicated and contrasted by the music and at the sudden—and terrifying—emergence of the tragic Carmen motif the philosopher bursts into a cry of triumph: "From this moment onwards we are in the presence of regular tragedy music!" He, indeed, never wearies of proclaiming that Bizet knew how to be profound with simplicity, striking

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without rhetoric and severely logical without pedantry, and he repeatedly asserts of the composer of "Carmen" what Montaigne said of Plutarch: "As soon as I open him, I appear to grow a pair of wings."

Whilst Nietzsche was exulting in his discovery, he was busily engaged in completing his treatise "La Gaya Scienza," a work bubbling over with vitality and "divine wickedness," a regular revel after so much privation and impotence, a hymn of glory for all things beautiful, free and joyous which is literally saturated with the atmosphere of "Carmen." Nietzsche, indeed, rejoiced in his sudden conversion from an intolerable state of morbid introspection to the marvellous blitheness of the laughing sun; he felt that the seas were once more open, and belief in a new art, a stronger, bolder, merrier art, once more permissible and praiseworthy.

"Who will sing us a new song," he cries, "a morning song, so sunny, so light, so fledged and so divinely serene that it will not scare the tantrums, but rather invite them to take part in the singing and dancing?"

He explores the fatuous contempt of melody and the lamentable stunting of the sense for melody (the sublimest enjoyment of the art of music) among Germans, and he was, indeed, one of the first to recognise that—as Dr. Oscar Bie says—"never have the flesh and blood of melody more genially created the body of an opera than in 'Carmen.' "

Above all, however, he longed for repose and deliverance from himself through art. "No, not such tones," he cries. "I can no longer breathe freely when this Wagnerian music begins to operate on me. I demand first of all from music relief, the ecstasies which are in good walking, striding, leaping and dancing. For God's sake, let brazen, leaden life be gilded by means of golden, good, tender melodies! My melancholy would, indeed, fain rest its head in the hiding-places and abysses of perfection; for this reason I need music. Let us strike up something more and more joyful, musician of the future." And with a thrill of tremulous ecstasy: "Oh, the divine beauty! With what enchantment it seizes me!"

That Nietzsche—who considered laughter necessary as the remedy of life—had Bizet constantly in mind whilst he was penning these glowing phrases is absolutely beyond doubt. The inspired musician alone capable of procuring for the weary philosopher in search of oblivion "the deliverance of himself through art" was undeniably the creator of "Carmen." A few days later

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he attended a performance of "Carmen" and wrote to Gast: "I was very happy once more. When this music is played, some very deep stratum is stirred within me, and while listening to it I feel resolved to hold out to the last and to unburden my heart of its supremest malice rather than perish beneath the weight of my own thoughts." Simultaneously he bewailed the vulgar brutality of Wagnerian music, and though he subsequently spoke of "the hallowed hour when Richard Wagner gave up the ghost," the death of the master of Bayreuth was, nevertheless, at the time "the most substantial relief that could have been given just now." He had, indeed, at last found his path and was convinced—not altogether without reason—of the proximity of something unparalled. "La Gaya Scienza" had, indeed, already revealed the high aspirations of a mind which now at last reaches its culminating point. Nietzsche, moreover, declares that two months before the inspiration of "Thus Spake Zarathustra" he had an intimation of its coming in the form of a sudden and decisive change in his tastes, particularly in music. "I discovered," he cries in language forcibly reminiscent of the gorgeous splendour of Poe's "Eleonora," "that the phœnix of music hovered over me in lighter and brighter plumage than it had ever worn before." Until then he had, indeed, only been able to flutter his wings; now, at last, he was able to fly.

In a short poem he flings his contempt into the face of Wagner "sinking all helpless by the cross," whilst the following verses entitled "Music of the South" are probably—though commentators are not all of the same opinion—addressed to Bizet:

All that my eagle e'er saw clear,
I see and feel in heart to-day,
(Although my hope was wan and grey)
Thy song like arrow pierced mine ear,
A balm to touch, a balm to hear,
As down from heaven it winged its way.
So now for lands of southern fire
To happy isles where Grecian nymphs hold sport,
Thither now turn the ship's desire,
No ship e'er sped to fairer port.

The first part of his masterpiece, "Zarathustra"—according to its author "the loftiest book on earth, the greatest gift that has ever been bestowed on men"—was written in a state of feverish excitement within the course of a few days. "Nothing perhaps has ever been produced out of such a superabundance of strength," cries Nietzsche. It is significant to note that the very qualities he particularly praised in "Carmen": "the halcyonic brightness, the

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light feet, the intoxicating presence of wickedness and exuberance"—these very qualities (never dreamt of before as a prerequisite of greatness) he now declared to be the essence of the type Zarathustra. There is, moreover, already a hint of the vigorous and provocative style of "The Case of Wagner" in the following words addressed by Zarathustra (Nietzsche) to the Magician (Wagner): "Air! Let in good air! Thou makest this cave sultry and poisonous, thou bad old magician! Thou stage-player! With thunder and heavenly fireworks must one speak to indolent and somnolent senses. But beauty's voice speaketh gently; it appealeth only to the most awakened senses." "Thunder and heavenly fireworks" had, indeed, invariably been Wagner's chief means of impressing the multitude.

Two years later in "Beyond Good and Evil" he deplores the fact that none of the modern German composers are "good Europeans" ("men who have unlearned the love of their own people because they have learnt to love many peoples"), that they are no longer the deeply pledged heirs of a millennium of European thought. In his opinion both Schumann ("the mawkish Saxon") and Wagner ("the cranky and desperate decadent afloat on a sea of patriotic nonsense and self-adoration") are hopelessly and exclusively German, neither of them constituting a European event such as Beethoven and, in a yet higher degree, Mozart had been. He considered that German music lacked the liberality and universality of outlook of a Goethe and was consequently threatened with its greatest danger, that of "losing the voice for the soul of Europe" and degenerating into a purely national affair.

The great philosopher, "a Southerner not by origin, but by belief," dreamt, indeed, of a music freed from the tyrannous influence of the North, a music which would be a successful halfway synthesis of the North and South, a music which would not fade, pale or die away at the sight of the blue, wanton sea and the clear, Mediterranean sky—"a super-European music which would hold its own even in the presence of the dark sunsets of the desert, a music whose soul is akin to the palm-tree, a music that knows how to live and move among great beasts of prey, beautiful and solitary; a music whose supreme charm is its ignorance of good and evil."

He felt, indeed, that he must be on his guard against German music, which had injured both his health and taste, and he frantically asserted that France was still the seat of the most intellectual and refined culture of Europe, the high school of sentiment,

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taste and manners, in short "the only country where there is still a preunderstanding and ready welcome for those rarer and rarely gratified men who are too comprehensive to find satisfaction in any kind of fatherlandism, and know how to love the South when in the North, and the North when in the South—the born Midlanders, the good Europeans. For them," he concludes triumphantly, "Bizet has made music, this latest genius who has seen a new beauty and a new seduction, who has discovered new lands—the Southern lands of music."

Nietzsche loved Bizet all the more because he fancied that—like himself—the composer of "Carmen" was "an undiscovered genius," and that by its nature and by its clear perception of the spirit of the race his work was well in advance of its time. Consequently it was absolutely necessary for a man of his type to be misunderstood. "Oh, the solitude of all givers! Oh, the silence of all beacons!" cries the creator of Zarathustra. When Wagner's music was no longer unappreciated, no longer to be savoured by the intellectually aristocratic few, when it had become an art for everybody and "the greedy lip-smacking rabble with its grinning mouths and unclean thirst begins to hob-nob with you as if you were one of themselves," at that moment he shudderingly withdrew from the master of Bayreuth and boldly sailed his bark on unexplored seas and discovered Bizet, one who still possessed the gift of melody and was devoid of the restlessness, the lack of form and repose in every bar which is the main characteristic of the Wagnerian music.

In the meantime Nietzsche was engaged, with characteristic ardour, in practical propaganda on behalf of Bizet. He finally induced Felix Mottl—who, moreover, considered Nietzsche's own "Hymnus an das Leben" a very effective composition—to perform "L'Arlésienne" and the "Roma" Symphony, and subsequently addressed a letter of thanks to him for his tireless efforts on Bizet's behalf. (Mottl finally produced Bizet's posthumous opera "Noé.") Nevertheless, it is not a little disconcerting to note that he does not seem to have been particularly enamoured of the incomparable "Arlésienne," which many eminent French critics still consider Bizet's masterpiece. Apart from the exquisitely tender and moving "Adagietto"—the serenity of which is religious and almost sacred and which Nietzsche himself considered "sublime"—this ravishingly beautiful music failed to produce a lasting impression. Indeed, the Bizet he adored was not the delicately subtle and profoundly melancholy artist of "Djamileh" and "L'Arlésienne" beloved of Brahms and Wolf, but the nimble, gay, impetuous,

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exuberant composer of "Carmen" and the "Roma" Symphony. Of the latter work he remarks: "How extraordinarily charming—naïve and subtle simultaneously, as, indeed, is everything composed by this last master of French music. Poor fellow, he never even lived to hear his work."

Evidently, German musicians of the early eighties, in contradistinction to many modern iconoclasts who recklessly refer to "Carmen" as "crude" and "commonplace," could imagine nothing more "subtle" than Bizet's masterpiece. Bungert (the pretentious author of a trilogy based on the Homeric poems and once regarded as one of the greatest composers of the Wagnerian school) considered the orchestration of "Carmen" "truly extraordinary, altogether too subtle." He whom Berlioz had kissed on the forehead with the words "Dieu vous aime" accordingly hastened to inform Nietzsche that the illustrious composer of "Les Troyens" was almost entirely responsible for the intoxicating and exciting instrumental colouring of "Carmen." Strange to say, Nietzsche at first also believed that Bizet was a pupil of Berlioz, though these two most fascinating personalities of French music have extraordinarily little in common. Certain critics, however, maintain that a more intimate acquaintanceship with Berlioz' works on the part of Nietzsche would have instantly resulted in a radical alteration of his views. Indeed, M. Julien Tiersot even asserts that had Nietzsche known "Les Troyens" he would have immediately substituted it for "Carmen" as "the monument of Mediterranean art wherewith he wished to confront the art of the North." There is, nevertheless, every reason to believe that Nietzsche—who many years previously had been playfully satirised on account of his exclusive devotion to Berlioz—was intimately acquainted with practically all the works of the composer of "Les Troyens." He, however, subsequently placed him in the same category as Wagner, stigmatising him as a typical decadent on the verge of hysteria, one whose very strength originated not out of plentitude, but out of want. He, indeed, considered his works poisoned by a very considerable residue of morbid and incurable romanticism—a slamming of the door in the face of nature—and the boisterous prophet of "La Gaya Scienza" would have, indeed, been the very last to prefer this gloomy neurotic, whose soul was preyed upon by death, to his beloved Bizet so greedy of life, whose music he considered filled with a sense of the open air such as we find in no other composer.

During the years immediately following the publication of "Beyond Good and Evil" in 1886, Nietzsche became more and

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more of a Bizet enthusiast. He considered that the joy of living on this earth was increased by the existence of such a man as Bizet and, whilst ardent admiration for the composer of "Carmen" was alone sufficient recommendation in his sight, indifference to his idol was regarded as a mortal and unforgivable offence. "I wish the spirit of Bizet to permeate my whole surroundings," he cries. Arthur Egidi bears witness to the truth of this statement. On one occasion he was discussing music with the philosopher and, moreover, indulging in enthusiastic encomiums of Bach and Beethoven. To his surprise and mortification, however, Nietzsche unexpectedly fell into a listless weariness. His eyes were lustreless, and he replied only in monosyllables; when a name was spoken by chance that had a magical effect. It was that of Bizet. Of a sudden the philsopher's whole frame quivered in feverish excitement, his face beamed with rapture, his deep-set star-like eyes flashed fire and his words rolled forth with the impetuosity of a mountain torrent. He was never weary of praising the spirituality and unfailing elegance of the composer of "Carmen," his nimble volatile art which "blazes up like a pure flame into a cloudless sky," and Egidi was under the impression that these were the only qualities he demanded from music.

As a matter of fact, Nietzsche found in Bizet's music what Delacroix had found in Mozart's; not merely a distraction of an overworked mind concentrated too feverishly on some great philosophical work, but above all a powerful incitement to production. There is a passage in "The Case of Wagner," the very construction and atmosphere of which bear a striking resemblance to the prelude to the second act of "Carmen," and which concludes with the emphatic words: "Bizet makes me productive."

In "The Will to Power" the contrast between Bizet and Wagner is still further accentuated: "The Frenchman simplifies, rationalises, embellishes. The German muddles, compromises, involves and infects everything with morality." Nietzsche, indeed, was never weary of bewailing the typical "old-maidish moralin-corroded mentality" of his countrymen and praising the roguish indulgence towards everything and the freedom from moralic acid in the theme of "Carmen." "Not the love of a cultured girl! No Senta-sentimentality!" he exclaims contemptuously. "But love translated back into Nature."

In the meantime Nietzsche regularly attended performances of "Carmen," informing his friend Peter Gast with almost painful conscientiousness of every production he witnessed. It is, moreover, not a little interesting to know that in December 1887 he

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was present at a performance of "Les Pêcheurs de Perles," but—mirabile dictu!—ran away after the first act.

For once Bizet had produced the same effect as Wagner, for after every first act of that "evil magician" Nietzsche, indeed, declared that he felt bored to death and compelled to leave the theatre on the spot. He, moreover, considered that Bizet's juvenile opera exhibited a lamentable want of equilibrium and was unduly influenced by Gounod, Félicien David and—Wagner's "Lohengrin."

"This tragical operetta" was also the contemptuous verdict of Hans von Bülow, with whose somewhat questionable interpretation of "Carmen" Nietzsche, moreover, entirely sympathised. As a matter of fact, Bülow took all "Carmen" in a tempo that was intolerably slow and dragging. When questioned about his slow tempi, the great conductor testily retorted that he intended in this way to suggest the dignity of the Spaniards. "Had Bülow ventured to conduct 'Carmen' in this pompous manner in Paris," cries Weingartner, "he would have been stoned alive." On the other hand, Nietzsche realised that a work will bear taking all kinds of tempi, if only there be genius in the performer, and he, moreover, welcomed Bülow's refusal to "compromise 'Carmen' in the usual German manner by degrading it to the level of an operetta." Obviously encouraged by the philosopher's support in this much-discussed affair, Bülow is said to have declared that Nietzsche ought to write a treatise on modern music and incidentally explain the reason of his departure from Bayreuth.

In the spring of the year 1888, Nietzsche took up his abode at Turin. At that very moment a "Carmen" epidemic broke out in the capital of Piedmont—"to celebrate my arrival," he facetiously exclaims. "Successo piramidale," he informs Dr. Fuchs, "tutto Torino carmenizzato." The phenomenal success of his "opera of operas"—together with Bülow's suggestion—encouraged Nietzsche to write "The Case of Wagner," and in the midst of the appallingly severe task of his life, the "annihilation of Wagner" was to him a veritable recreation.

This Wagner essay was destined to be his "chant du cygne." Poor Nietzsche had fondly imagined that it was merely a prelude to a work of immeasurably greater importance entitled "A Transvaluation of All Values," a destructive thunderbolt which would send the whole of civilization into convulsions. Indeed, the general opinion that "The Case of Wagner" was as much an improvisation as Stendhal's "Life of Rossini" may not be entirely

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devoid of truth, though the very fact that Nietzsche took the trouble of copying out the manuscript twice seems to prove exactly the contrary. In the preface to his work he writes: "It is not malice alone which makes me praise Bizet at the expense of Wagner. To turn my back on Wagner was for me a piece of fate—to get to like anything else whatever afterwards was a triumph."

He started his famous essay in the following way:

"Yesterday—would you believe it?—I heard Bizet's masterpiece for the twentieth time. How such a work completes one! Through it one almost becomes 'a masterpiece' oneself. Bizet's music, indeed, seems to me perfect. It comes forward lightly, gracefully, stylishly. It is lovable, it does not sweat. 'All that is good is easy, everything divine runs with light feet.' This is the first principle of my æsthetics." We may add that this is, moreover, merely a repetition of one of the most famous aphorisms of Zarathustra: "Thoughts that come on dove's feet lead the world."

Both his intense horror of the melancholy and gloom of the North and his ardent longing for the laughter and joy of the South are spontaneously revealed in what are perhaps the most significant words of the whole essay:

"Wagner is not the only saviour; Bizet's work also saves; with him I bid farewell to the damp North and all the fog of the Wagnerian ideal. His music is gay, but not in a French or German way. Its gaiety is African; fate hangs over it; its happiness is short, sudden, without reprieve. I envy Bizet for having had the courage of this sensitiveness which hitherto in the cultured music of Europe has found no means of expression—of this Southern, tawny, sunburnt sensitiveness."

Many of us may consider this an unwarrantable exaggeration, yet who has ever spoken of Bizet with more tenderness or sensibility? That Bizet's music gives utterance to things which had formerly no tongue is, moreover, undeniable and it is, indeed, well to repeat this to those who can see in "Carmen" nothing else but a traditional French *opéra comique*, impregnated with the spirit of the Massenet who "slumbers in the heart of every Frenchman." Thanks mostly to the senseless antics and pantomimic hocus-pocus of famous singers in the title-rôle, Bizet's masterpiece has also unfortunately been lowered in the esteem of many persons otherwise lacking neither in taste nor in culture. This brazen appeal to the music-hall habitués cannot be sufficiently deprecated.

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After laying particular stress on the fact that Bizet's music possesses the refinement of a race and not that of an individual, Nietzsche proceeds:

"Have more painful, more tragic accents ever been heard on the stage before? And how are they obtained? Without grimaces! Without counterfeiting of any kind! Free from the lie of the grand style! I, indeed, know no case in which the tragic irony which constitutes the kernel of love is expressed with such severity or in so terrible a formula as in the last cry of Don José with which the work ends. Perhaps you are now beginning to perceive how very much this music improves me? 'Il faut méditerraniser la musique.' "

After reading so extraordinary—some may say extravagant—an eulogy, we may perhaps be permitted to ask whether Nietzsche was really in earnest. Mr. Huneker declares that we learn from Nietzsche's letters that as a joke he put up Bizet as a man of straw to fight the Wagner idol. Now, though the philosopher had written the following Latin quotations, "Ridendo dicere severum," on the title-page of his essay and had, moreover, asserted that he always attached a little tail of farce to the most serious things, he certainly subsequently wrote to his friend, Dr. Fuchs:

"You mustn't take what I have said about Bizet too seriously; in my present frame of mind, I don't care a brass farthing for him. But as an ironical antithesis against Wagner the glorification of 'Carmen' was certainly most effective. After all, it would have been an incomparable lack of taste on my part to have begun my essay by praising Beethoven."

Whatever we may think of this somewhat exasperating communication, most of us will probably agree with the last sentence. Nevertheless, no less an authority than Mr. Bernard Shaw—who had previously fancied that Bizet's masterpiece had served him as "a safety-valve for his romantic impulses"—has been guilty of this "incomparable lack of taste" when he savagely exclaims:

"What can we say to a man who, after pitting his philosophy against Wagner with refreshing force and ingenuity, proceeds to hold up as the masterpiece of modern musical drama—blazing with all the merits which the Wagnerian music-dramas lack—guess what! "Don Giovanni," perhaps, or "Orfeo," or "Fidelio?" Not at all! "Carmen," no less. Yes, as I live by bread, as I made that bread for many a year by listening to music, Georges Bizet's 'Carmen.' "

Such cheap facetiousness would have fully justified Nietzsche in retorting: "The man who places Bunyan above Shakespeare

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is not worthy of a moment's serious consideration." Indeed, however subversive and startling his opinions on other questions, Mr. Shaw is on the whole—as regards music—perhaps a trifle too conventional. To consider "Carmen" "at best only a delicately flimsy little opera" is almost as absurd and certainly as manifestly unjust and superficial as to proclaim it—as Huneker has done—"merely a sparkling compound of Gounod and Spanish gipsy airs." It is, moreover, a proof of almost incredible short-sightedness and bluntness of the senses on the part of one who arrogates to himself a higher taste. Finally, I consider him to have taken rather an unfair advantage of Nietzsche, since the latter, in his "Case of Wagner," was professedly dealing with the works of contemporary composers alone. As for "Fidelio," certainly one of the least inspired of Beethoven's creations and from a purely operatic point of view more or less of a failure, Nietzsche was fond of declaring how much Schiller, or more exactly, how much Thekla (the inexpressible sentimental heroine of "Wallenstein") there was in it. It could, indeed, scarcely be expected to appeal to the sick and weary philosopher literally gasping for a breath of fresh, crisp, bracing air from the South and the merry, roguish, breezy music of one "who loves the Mediterranean as well as I do." Indeed, before he became acquainted with Bizet's intoxicating music, Nietzsche had delighted in the gay, sunny, airy and delicate spirit of Mozart, and in the inimitable Chopin, "the freest and daintiest of elves," and, indeed, nothing but the most transparent hypocrisy—witness the conversation with Egidi—could ever have induced this ingrained Southerner to prefer "Fidelio" or even "Orfeo" to "Carmen." Had Mr. Shaw restricted himself to "Don Giovanni" or—shall we say?—"The Barber of Seville," he would have displayed an infinitely more intimate acquaintanceship with the somewhat complex mentality of his brother-philosopher.

On the other hand, in spite of his incriminating letter to Dr. Fuchs, Nietzsche repeatedly assured his friends that he was thoroughly in earnest, that they must not allow themselves to be led astray for one instant by the pamphlet's tone of levity and irony. He literally revels in the memory of those "happy days at Turin," during the course of which "The Case of Wagner" was written. He immediately announced his intention of publishing a French translation and was convinced that his work was in many respects in intimate harmony with French tastes and that his appreciation of Bizet would be read with the greatest interest. "This essay, well translated into French," he exclaims, "would be

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read by half the world! I am the only authority in this matter, and, moreover, enough of a psychologist and a musician not to be imposed upon by anything in all matters of technique."

For a moment he thought of entrusting M. Paul Bourget, the extraordinarily subtle psychologist, with the exacting task of translation, but the latter was unfortunately not sufficiently versed "in rebus musicis et musicantibus." Nietzsche subsequently forwarded a copy of his work to the famous Danish Shakespearean critic, Georg Brandes. The latter replied:

"A few days before receiving your pamphlet, I witnessed a performance of 'Carmen.' What splendid music! But all the same, at the risk of displeasing you, I must confess that 'Tristan and Isolde' also made an indelible impression on me." (Nietzsche himself considered this Wagner's *non plus ultra.*)

A month later, Nietzsche heard the "Patrie" overture for the first time and found in it a welcome occasion for a fresh outburst of enthusiasm for his old idol. "It really produced upon me the strongest impression I have ever experienced at a concert in my whole life," he exclaims. "You ought to hear how the little man grows heroic!" A few days later he forwarded his tantalising letter to Dr. Fuchs. In the presence of such contradictory statements we must, however, bear in mind that the terrible cloud of madness was already hovering over him. He began to sign his letters "The Man on the Cross," and in the agony of his suffering to cover innumerable sheets of paper with the wildest and most delirious fantasies, reviling his dearest friends in the most unmeasured terms. He had, indeed, been accused of attempting to gain notoriety by scattering his mud on the graves of the dead and the heads of the living. Moreover, Richard Pohl's malignantly cruel statement: "The man who is capable of listening to 'Carmen' twenty times in a state of gentle reverence is a fit subject for the lunatic asylum," and his slanderous declaration that Nietzsche had written an opera which Wagner had summarily dismissed as "silly trash," filled the wretched philosopher with the utmost horror and dismay, and at the moment almost robbed him of his reason. Only a few days later the bow snapped—and the warrior broke down.

Nietzsche's illness is, however, scarcely perceptible in his essay "The Case of Wagner," which superabounds—as it were—in intellectual health. The so-called "madman with flashing eyes and foaming mouth spouting forth deafening bombast" is much more visible in his early works than in this sharp and penetrating treatise, and Huneker's declaration that Nietzsche was

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already struck down when he wrote it is absolutely devoid of truth. We have every reason to believe that Nietzsche penned his work with gleeful energy; and Isabella von Ungern-Sternberg, who visited him about this time, explicitly affirms that he possessed a cool head and a critical mind combined with the greatest possible sobriety.

In this connection it is particularly interesting to ask what it was in the first place that induced Nietzsche to praise Bizet at Wagner's expense. Those who—founding their charge on a single statement in an incoherent letter written within a week of the catastrophe—fancy that, in his rage against Wagner, Nietzsche put up Bizet as a mere man of straw to make his ex-hero ridiculous, are simply indulging in a rather poor piece of special pleading. I can only request them to study the philosopher's life and works, and above all to read his letters which—during the seven years preceding the catastrophe—literally teem with the most enthusiastic references to the composer of "Carmen." Neither, however, was Nietzsche tempted by a morbid craving to startle people or to offend Frau Cosima Wagner, "the woman I revere above all women in the world" and who—though she had accused him of treachery—still occasionally regarded him as her husband's predestined champion in the non-musical world.

Nevertheless, Spiteller (then unknown to fame), who was still smarting from certain pungent remarks of the philosopher, brutally accused him a few months before the catastrophe of having written "The Case of Wagner" not out of enthusiasm for his cause, but with the sole purpose of gratifying his private animosity against the dead Wagner. Nietzsche—stung to the quick —replied sardonically: "It is quite natural that I connect my conversion with 'Carmen.' I know you will not doubt it one minute —simply one more malignity of mine! As a matter of fact, I know the success of 'Carmen' awakened Wagner's wrath and envy."

How could he know this? Three months after the publication of "The Case of Wagner"—shortly before the horrible catastrophe—Nietzsche wrote to Gast: "Gersdorff has just paid me a visit. Now listen to a strange thing he has told me about which I am highly delighted. He assures me he saw Wagner in a paroxysm of rage against Bizet when Minnie Hauk was at Naples and sang 'Carmen.' Since Wagner has himself taken sides in the matter, my malice in a certain important passage of the essay will be all the more keenly felt."

The last sentence is obviously somewhat incriminating, though it is, nevertheless, evident that Nietzsche knew absolutely

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nothing of the incident when he actually wrote the essay. The story is no doubt true, the outburst in question probably taking place in January 1881. Wagner was at that time more or less intimately acquainted with Minnie Hauk, whose husband, the explorer Hesse-Wartegg, had previously chosen Wagner's favourite resort Triebschen as his residence. Nietzsche, moreover, knew from bitter experience that the master of Bayreuth was particularly fond of indulging in uncontrollable fits of temper at the expense of hapless individuals who had ventured to compose "something worth while."

Nevertheless, I do not deny that the philosopher was fired by the desire to take vengeance for his lost happiness on one whom he fancied was exclusively engaged in poisoning the wells of life. To praise Bizet at the expense of Wagner with the sole purpose of gratifying a deep and implacable personal feud was, however, a sentiment utterly foreign to the nature of one who was not interested in persons as persons, but only in their artistic and intellectual manifestations. No, the glorification of "Carmen" was no mere firework paradox, or the man who was always in a state of nervous agitation bordering on hysteria would not on several occasions—according to his own testimony—have listened five hours with gentle reverence to Bizet's music. Indeed, this triumph over his impatience was a matter of inexpressible wonder to him—"the first step to holiness"—and yet he scarcely ever missed a performance of "Carmen." More than once we read: "Bizet's orchestration is practically the only one I can endure now," and it was after seeing "Carmen" no less than four times during the course of a fortnight that Nietzsche exclaimed: "Life for me without music would be a blunder." And he adds: "Each time I heard 'Carmen' it seemed to me that I was more of a philosopher, a better philosopher than at any other time, I became so forbearing, so happy, so settled. Only so do I get outside myself. This music exercises a sobering influence upon me and I gaze at myself as from a distance. After a night of 'Carmen' follows a morning of resolute views and ideas. I feel as though I had been bathing in my natural element. Ah, what is life without music but a torture and an exile!"

Probably the break with Wagner was more owing to Nietzsche's state of health than most people realise. He himself admitted that his objections to Wagner's music were mainly "physiological objections." He had, indeed, the nerves of a Shelley and the digestion of a Carlyle, and Huneker not unjustifiably compares him to one of those oriental wonder-workers

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dancing in ecstasy on a white-hot sword blade, the tears streaming down his face as he proclaims his divine gospel of joy. "Il faut méditerraniser la musique."

As a matter of fact, his sickness (the combined diseases of the nerves of his eyes, brain and stomach) insensibly coloured his philosophy, and his frantic apotheosis of "Carmen" was partly due to the debilitated state of his health, the inevitable result of the morbidly feverish intensity of his mental activity, of thirty arduous years of an almost superhuman overuse of his brain. It is, indeed, scarcely an exaggeration to say that his intense devotion to Wagner and his music was turned to violent dislike by the influence of a diseased cerebral activity and that the final breach with the master of Bayreuth was merely an essential measure of hygiene. A man on whom an unendurable tension lies day and night, one who—like Edgar Allan Poe—is ever in dread of some "strange impending doom," will turn with instinctive loathing from the—if judged from this particular point of view—essentially morbid products of a brain such as Wagner's. In "The Case of Wagner" the significant words occur: "How terribly Wagnerian orchestration affects me! A disagreeable sweat breaks out all over me!" No martyr, indeed, ever endured more intense and prolonged agony than Nietzsche, and in his heroic battle for health he clutched desperately at Bizet's masterpiece like a drowning man at a spar. His joyless life seemed to lose its weight and misery by means of those delicate and smooth melodies, and his love for "Carmen" was consequently a violent, almost unreasoning, passion. Some critics have compared it to the craving of the sufferer for a narcotic, though Nietzsche himself would have been truly horrified at any such suggestion, since he considered Wagner's music "narcotic art par excellence" and, moreover, a perverted means of stimulating tired nerves.

Indeed, one of the main principles of his æsthetics was that it is easier to be titanic and overpowering than beautiful and melodious and that whilst Wagner's music clogs the soul, Bizet's gives it wings. This power of brightening and transfiguring the world and accelerating all bodily functions by means of light, bold, unfettered, self-reliant rhythms filled Nietzsche with the most intense admiration and delight, for he had long deplored the fact that the most subtle and elemental of all arts had become a music of decadence and negation and had ceased to be the flute of Dionysus. There is, nevertheless, a faint odour of the sick-room in the following words: "Music, for Heaven's sake, let us regard music as a recreation, a pleasure, a delight—and nothing else. On

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no account must we treat music as a whip-lash for exhausted nerves. What do I want from music? That it should be gay and profound like the golden autumn of an October afternoon, mild, kindly, not heated. That everything about it should be sweet, strange, subtle and spiritual. That it should bask in the sun and its feet trip in wayward fashion." All this he found in "Carmen," and there is no doubt that Bizet's music, tremulously and thrillingly alive with the ecstasy of mere living, exercised a most invigorating influence on the philosopher's debilitated nervous system, even as it had done on that of Hugo Wolf. He, indeed, celebrated in "Carmen" the return to nature, health and good spirits and the Websterian words addressed to Gast, "my future German Bizet," on the eve of his spiritual death were meant for the composer of "Carmen" himself: "Master, sing me a new song; the world is transfigured; all the heavens are rejoicing."

Judging from such ecstatic declarations we must not, however, be led to infer that Nietzsche's musical criticism during these years is consequently of little value. "The Case of Wagner" was written only a few months before the catastrophe, yet even Mr. Bernard Shaw recognises "its refreshing force and ingenuity." Though the influence of his disease occasionally weaves itself into the texture of his thoughts, it is, nevertheless, an extraordinary work containing remarkably acute and searching observations upon art. It is infinitely more readable than his early Wagnerian writings and reveals a light and swift vigour of movement which before he had never attained. Nevertheless, a distinguished critic has recently declared that Nietzsche was incapable of understanding Wagner, and that he was—as regards music—the feeblest mind that ever hitched itself to the stellar chariot of the master of Bayreuth. This critic laid particular stress on the fact that Nietzsche—in moments of aberration—wrote fourth-rate music which Hans von Bülow gruffly qualified as "regrettable pianoforte convulsions"—as if the absence of a creative gift necessarily implied that of a critical one. Wagner himself always had the very highest opinion of Nietzsche's gifts as a music critic, though we should, of course, beware of overrating such a testimonial.

Though many of us are partly justified in believing that, carried away by his ardour in the fight and what Romain Rolland ruthlessly calls "his mania for parodox," Nietzsche goes too far and becomes unjust, it is difficult to overrate the importance of "The Case of Wagner" as one of the most brilliant pieces of musical criticism ever written. The chapters dealing with "Carmen" may seem excessively laudatory, yet even such rapturous

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exclamations are, in spite of their dithyrambic character, essentially justified, as such a fanatical Wagnerite as Mr. Havelock Ellis willingly admits. Nevertheless, they still occasionally tempt people to indulge in exclamations of horror and amazement such as "After Wagner, Bizet!" After "Parsifal," "Carmen!" Good heavens! Huneker, for instance, though he refers to Bizet as an artist who might have changed history had he not "died of absinthe" (?!) at an early age, was never weary of ridiculing the man capable of "frantically asserting that Bizet was the creator of 'La Gaya Scienza' and a greater man than Wagner, blither and possessing the divine gaiety, sparkle and indescribable fascination of the Greeks" (an obvious reference to Nietzsche's poem "Music of the South.") In reply, though Nietzsche considered that Bizet stood to Wagner in much the same position as Stendhal to Victor Hugo ("that lighthouse on a sea of nonsense"), I do not for one instant believe that he ever felt or asserted that Bizet was a greater man than Wagner, who was, indeed, born to be a master of men. He, however, certainly was convinced that the Frenchman's music was simpler and more human and that he had a larger share of inherited musical wealth. Finally, he found in him the qualities he missed in Wagner and which he—whose whole work is merely a southernisation of the Northern mind—implicitly demanded from music: "The delicate Southern clearness of the sky, the limpidezza of the air. Tender golden melodies, charm and wit, a dainty, delicate little woman full of roguishness and grace, the delight of every tense profound male mind whose life is burdened with heavy responsibilities." And who can, indeed, gainsay him?

After all, Nietzsche is not entirely responsible for the flights of imagination of some of his followers. As we all know, his championship of Bizet encouraged certain French critics—who had previously stigmatized the composer of "Carmen" as a poseur aping Wagner and relying on a few eccentricities to win him admirers—to make extravagant claims on their countrymen's behalf and to set him above Wagner. Such comparisons are, of course, in the main futile, as on the one hand we are dealing with the work of a man who literally accomplished the formidable task he set out to perform, and, on the other, with that of one who was still engaged in groping his way when he was relentlessly struck down by the hand of fate.

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