

PERSONAL RECOLLECTIONS OF
Johannes Brahms

SOME OF HIS LETTERS TO
AND PAGES FROM A JOURNAL KEPT BY
George Henschel

With Portraits



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PREFACE

EXCERPTS from the journal I kept when traveling with Brahms in the seventies were published in the *Neues Tagblatt* of Vienna shortly after the master's death. A translation of them, to which was added a part of the recollections, appeared in the *Century Magazine* of March, 1901; and it is the kindly reception those fragments found with public and press at the time, which led me to believe that a publication of the whole might not be unwelcome to the great number of English-speaking musicians and lovers of music who, whilst more or less familiar with Brahms the composer, would fain improve their acquaintance with Brahms the man.

The addition of some of his letters to me will, I trust, serve to enhance what value there may be in the following pages, which, disclaiming all pretence to literary merit, are merely intended to be a help toward more completely understanding and appreciating the personal character of "The Last of the Classics."

G. H.

*Allt-na-criche,
Scotland, Summer, 1906.*

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JOHANNES BRAHMS

IT was on the occasion of the Lower Rhenish Musical Festival at Cologne in May 1874, that I first met Brahms. For weeks beforehand my mind had been occupied by the thought of seeing face to face the great composer whose name was then on every musician's lips as that of a man whose genius Robert Schumann had publicly proclaimed in the glowing language of an inspired prophet. And I well remember my embarrassment, and the sensation it gave me, when at last I was permitted to shake hands with him after the rehearsal of Handel's "Samson," in which oratorio I had been engaged to sing the part of Harapha. A few kind and encouraging words soon put me at my ease and I could give myself up to scrutinizing Brahms' personal appearance.

He was broad-chested, of somewhat short stature, with a tendency to stoutness. His face was then clean shaven, revealing a rather thick, genial underlip; the healthy and ruddy color of his skin indicated a love of nature and a habit of being in the open air in all kinds of weather; his thick straight hair of brownish color came nearly down to his shoulders. His clothes and boots were not exactly of the latest pattern, nor did they fit particularly well, but his linen was spotless.

What, however, struck me most was the kindliness of his eyes. They were of a light blue; wonderfully

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keen and bright, with now and then a roguish twinkle in them, and yet at times of almost childlike tenderness. Soon I was to find out that that roguish twinkle in his eyes corresponded to a quality in his nature which would perhaps be best described as good-natured sarcasm. A few illustrations will explain what I mean: A rather celebrated composer had asked Brahms to be allowed to play to him from the MS. his latest composition, a violin concerto. Brahms consented to hear it and seated himself near the piano. Mr. — played his work with great enthusiasm and force, the perspiration — it was a very warm day — streaming down his face.

When he had finished, Brahms got up, approached the piano, took a sheet of the manuscript between his thumb and middle-finger and, rubbing it between them, exclaimed, "I say, where do you buy your music paper? First rate!"

In the evening of the day of our first meeting I found myself sitting with Brahms in a *Kneipe* — one of those cosy restaurants, redolent of the mixed perfumes of beer, wine, tobacco, coffee, and food, so dear to Germans in general, and to German artists in particular — in the company of four or five prominent composers of the day, who had come from their different places of abode to attend the festival.

The musical proceedings of the day had been the chief topic of conversation (on one of the programmes having figured some new songs of mine) when suddenly one of the "Herren Kapellmeister," pointing toward

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me, exclaimed: "Now, just look at that lucky fellow Henschel! He can both sing and compose, and *we*" — describing with his hands a circle which included Brahms — "we can compose only."

"*And not even that*" it came instantly from Brahms, whilst his countenance bore the expression of the most perfect innocence.

Brahms was very fond of sitting with good friends over his beer or wine or his beloved "Kaffee" — with the accent, after the Viennese fashion, on the last syllable — in the *Kneipe* till the small hours of the day. After the performance of Samson our party did not break up until half-past two in the morning. For a young singer to sit late at night in a stuffy room full of tobacco smoke, for hours at a stretch, and that between two public appearances, is not precisely a thing I could conscientiously recommend any one to imitate; but at that time nothing would have induced me to leave the room before Brahms, so fascinated was I with his personality, so jealous of every minute of his company.

It was not until the early spring of the following year (1875) that I met Brahms again. In the mean time some letters had passed between us, relating to my singing for the society of the Friends of Music at Vienna, of whose concerts Brahms, at that time, was the conductor. I had been engaged to sing the part of Christ in Bach's Passion according to St. Matthew, and that of Odysseus in Max Bruch's secular oratorio of that name; and it may be imagined how great an

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inspiration it was for a young musician like myself to sing under the direction of Brahms and to be in daily and intimate intercourse with him, in anticipation of which privilege I had made arrangements for a prolonged stay in the Austrian capital. We went for a walk together every day, mostly in the Prater, the favorite out-of-door resort of the Viennese, and it seemed a matter of no small gratification to Brahms to find himself recognized and deferentially greeted everywhere we happened to drop in for an occasional rest.

The numerous public gardens where Gipsy bands played, especially attracted us, and it was a delight to notice the increased spirit those brown sons of the Puszta put into their music in the presence of the master who had done so much toward opening up to their beloved tunes a wider sphere of popularity.

The two concerts mentioned above went off beautifully. Brahms had trained the chorus with infinite care and conducted with great earnestness.

The performance of "Odysseus" was the last that Brahms directed for the society, having resigned his post early in the year. It took place in the forenoon and was followed by the solemn ceremony of presenting Brahms with an illuminated address of Farewell, acknowledging his great achievements as conductor of the society, and expressing the society's and the chorus's regret at his resignation. A local celebrity, rather naughtily styled by Brahms "the poet of the 'inner

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town,' '* delivered a very eulogistic oration, which Brahms, who could hardly disguise his being considerably bored, merely acknowledged with a painfully curt "Thank you very much." Then he took under his arm the folio containing the address and walked away. He afterwards told me that such official proceedings were exceedingly distasteful to him.

Far more to his liking was the supper at one of the leading hotels, to which, on the evening of that day, a great many of his friends sat down with him, and which the presence of ladies made all the more acceptable to the guest of the evening.

The memory of the anniversary of Beethoven's death (March 26th) in that year will never fade from my mind, since it was my great privilege to spend part of the day with Brahms in the very chamber in which the great composer had died. Common friends of ours were then living in the suite of rooms once occupied by Beethoven in the Schwarz-Spanierhaus. From the corner of the room in which Beethoven's bed had stood, his bust, adorned with a laurel wreath, looked down upon us, and though nearly half a century had passed away since that historical thunderstorm during which the immortal soul of the Titan had freed itself from its earthly fetters, so deeply were we impressed by the solemnity of the hour, that when, after a long silence, we

*Vienna is divided into several postal districts, all radiating from the central one, No. 1, which is called "the inner town."

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began to speak again, we did so in a subdued whisper only.

It was in the following year that I began my journal. My profession brought me into frequent contact with the master, who, to my gratification, seemed to have permitted the young, enthusiastic musician to have, in intimate hours, an occasional deeper insight into the workings of his mind and the remoter recesses of his heart than was vouchsafed to the outer world, against which he appeared to be fortified with the *aes triplex* of irony, sarcasm, and indifference. I was anxious to preserve the many interesting things he had to say on musical and other matters, and scrupulously jotted down my recollections in the evening of each day spent in Brahms' company. I have not attempted to embellish or improve upon the style, if style there be, of these cursory notes, but give them, translated literally from the manuscript as it lies before me, written in pencil and with no corrections whatever, thus indicating the utter absence, at that time, of any desire on my part to let them see the light of publicity.

THE JOURNAL

Münster, Westphalia, February 3, 1876.

BRAHMS arrived yesterday. I am glad my hoarseness is gradually disappearing, for the thought of singing, at the concert day after tomorrow, those high notes in his "Triumphal Hymn" for Double Chorus and Baritone Solo,* rather troubled me. I asked him if eventually he would object to my altering some of the highest notes into more convenient ones on account of my cold, and he said: "Not in the least. As far as I am concerned, a thinking, sensible singer may, without hesitation, change a note which for some reason or other is for the time being out of his compass, into one which he can reach with comfort, *provided always the declamation remains correct and the accentuation does not suffer.*

*Op. 55, published in 1872 (Simrock).

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February 6.

YESTERDAY was the concert. Brahms played his Pianoforte Concerto in D Minor superbly. I especially noted his emphasizing each of those tremendous shakes in the first movement by placing a short rest between the last note of one and the first small note before the next. During those short stops he would lift his hands up high and let them come down on the keys with a force like that of a lion's paw. It was grand.

Dear old Isegrim * conducted and fairly chuckled with joy at every beautiful phrase. The glorious but horribly difficult "Triumphal Hymn" conducted by Brahms, went splendidly. It was a veritable triumph for the composer. The joy and gratification expressed in Brahms' face at the end, when acknowledging the enthusiastic acclamations of audience, chorus, and orchestra, was evidently caused as much by the consciousness of having written a truly great work, as by its reception and appreciation; a most welcome change from the affected excess of modesty often exhibited on concert platforms.

My throat not being quite well yet, I changed, with Brahms' approval, the dreaded phrase

*"Isegrim," the poetic name for bear was the sobriquet of the composer Julius Otto Grimm, an old friend of Brahms', who was then at the head of the various musical institutions of Münster.

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and sang it like this:



by which Brahms' intention of emphasizing the word "heavens" was still carried out, the note "c" remaining the highest of the phrase.

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Coblence on the Rhine, February 26.

BRAHMS and I were the soloists at the orchestral concert which took place last night under Maszkowski's conductorship. The day before was the final full rehearsal ("Generalprobe") to which in most places in Germany the public are admitted. Brahms had played Schumann's Concerto in A Minor and missed a good many notes. So in the morning of the day of the concert he went to the Concert Hall to practice. He had asked me to follow him thither a little later and to rehearse with him the songs — his, of course — he was to accompany me in the evening. When I arrived at the hall I found him quite alone, seated at the piano and working away for all he was worth, on Beethoven's "Choral Fantasia" and Schumann's Concerto. He was quite red in the face, and, interrupting himself for a moment on seeing me stand beside him, said with that childlike, confiding expression in his eyes: "Really, this is too bad. Those people tonight expect to hear something especially good and here I am likely to treat them to a hoggish mess. I assure you, I could play today, with the greatest ease, far more difficult things, with wider stretches for the fingers, my own concerto for example, but those simple diatonic runs are exasperating. I keep saying to myself: '*But Johannes, pull yourself together,—Do play decently,*' —but no use; it's really horrid."

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After our little private rehearsal of the songs Brahms, Maszkowski, who had in the meantime joined us, and I repaired to Councillor Wegeler's, Brahms' host, in accordance with an invitation to inspect the celebrated and really wonderful wine-cellars of his firm, and to partake of a little luncheon in the sample room afterwards. Toward the end of the repast, which turned out to be a rather sumptuous affair, relished by Brahms as much as by any of us, a bottle of old Rauenthaler of the year '65 was opened, with due ceremony, by our host. It proved indeed to be a rare drop, and we all sat in almost reverential silence, bent over the high, light-green goblets, which we held in close proximity to our respective noses. Wegeler at last broke the silence with the solemn words: "Yes, gentlemen, what Brahms is among the composers, this Rauenthaler is among the wines." Quick as lightning Brahms exclaimed: "*Ah, then let's have a bottle of Bach now!*"

The concert went off well, as did the supper afterward. Brahms was in particularly high spirits. The many proofs of sincere admiration and affection he had received during his stay in Coblenz had greatly pleased and touched him, and he went so far as to make a speech — a very rare thing with him.

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Wiesbaden, February 27, 1876.

YESTERDAY Brahms and I left Coblenz. We were quite alone in our compartment, and I had the happiness of finding him, in regard to his own self and his way of working, more communicative than ever before. Commencing by speaking of the events of the past days, we soon drifted into talking about art in general and music in particular.

“There is no real *creating*,” he said, “without hard work. That which you would call invention, that is to say, a thought, an idea, is simply an inspiration from above, for which I am not responsible, which is no merit of mine. Yea, it is a present, a gift, which I ought even to despise until I have made it my own by right of hard work. And there need be no hurry about that, either. It is as with the seed-corn; it germinates unconsciously and in spite of ourselves. When I, for instance, have found the first phrase of a song, say,



I might shut the book there and then, go for a walk, do some other work, and perhaps not think of it again for months. Nothing, however, is lost. If afterward I approach the subject again, it is sure to have taken

*The beginning of the beautiful song, “Die Mainacht”, op. 43.



*Last bars of the Song, "O wüsst ich doch
den weg fürück" (op. 63)*

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shape; I can now begin to really work at it. But there are composers who sit at the piano with a poem before them, putting music to it from A to Z until it is done. They write themselves into a state of enthusiasm which makes them see something finished, something important, in every bar."

Immediately after our arrival here we had a rehearsal for tonight's concert. Brahms played his "Concerto in D Minor" magnificently. His touch is wonderfully crisp and clear.

After the concert we went to the house of the Princess of Hesse-Barchfeld to supper. Although Brahms, Ernst Franck, the genial composer and conductor, who had come over from Mannheim, and I were the only non-aristocratic guests present, the affair was very charming and *gemütlich*. Brahms' neighbor at table was the very handsome and fascinating wife of a celebrated general, and this fact, together with the fiery Rhine-wine, had a most animating effect on him. After supper the greater part of the company had a very lively game of billiards, and just before leaving, the princess presented Brahms with a handsome box of ebony, to the lid of which a laurel wreath of silver was attached. Each leaf of the wreath had the title of one of Brahms' works engraved on it. He was delighted, though much amused at finding on one of the leaves "Triumphlied," that colossal Song of Triumph for double chorus and orchestra, and on the very one next to it "Wiegenlied," the sweet little lullaby of eighteen bars.

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Berlin, February 28, 1876.

JUST arrived home from Wiesbaden. Spent another highly interesting day there with Brahms yesterday. In the morning there was a *matinée musicale* at the house of the same Princess of Hesse-Barchfeld. The Frankfort String Quartet, Hugo Heermann leading, had come over for the purpose. Brahms played with them his "Quartet in C Minor, Op. 60," and then accompanied me in the longest, and to me the finest, of his romances from Tieck's beautiful *Magellone*, "Wie soll ich die Freude, die Wonne denn tragen," Op. 33, No. 6.

After the *matinée* Brahms took me to the Landgravine Anna of Hesse, a princess of considerable musical talent, whom however, as he told me, he mostly admired for her simple and modest, yet extremely cordial and affable manners. Otherwise he does not particularly care for personal intercourse with the "highest spheres of society," as he called it.

Last night, being Sunday before Shrove-Tuesday, we had intended to go to the masked ball at the *Kur-saal*, to which we had already taken tickets. In the afternoon, however, Brahms came to my room in the hotel, and said: "I say! I have another idea; let us give the tickets to the head-waiter and ourselves rather go to Mr. X.,* which will entertain us just as well.

*A composer of the most wonderful fertility, at that time quite celebrated and rather popular.

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You know, I am really fond of the man, but can't help being amused at his good-natured loquacity, which to me is as good as a play. *Do* make him speak of Wagner; I like that especially; and also ask him to show you one of his orchestral scores; they are really models of what copying ought to be. You will see that Mr. X. is an extraordinary fellow. He is not happy unless he composes a certain number of hours every day, and with all that he copies even the parts of his symphonies himself."

Well, to Mr. X.'s house we went accordingly, finding, to our satisfaction, both him and his wife at home. Brahms seemed tired; he spoke little, which, however, was only natural, since both Mr. X. and his wife seemed to vie with each other as to which could talk most and quickest. At last Mr. X., who constantly reminded me of Don Bartolo without the wig, was called away into the next room by his barber, who had come to shave him, and the task of entertaining us rested on Mrs. X.'s shoulders alone. "You have no idea," she said, "how hard a worker X. is." (She never said "my husband.") "I am proud and happy to have at last prevailed upon him to go for a walk with our daughter every day for two hours, thus keeping him at least for two hours a day from composing."

"*Ah, that's good, that's very good,*" said Brahms instantly, again looking as innocent as a new-born babe. Mr. X., upon our taking leave, offered to accompany us on a little stroll through the park, during which he

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told us he had received an invitation to conduct one of his symphonies at a coming musical festival in Silesia. Upon my speaking rather disparagingly of the musical achievements of the moving spirit of that festival, a member of the highest aristocracy, who had published and produced several pretentious and very inferior compositions of his own, Brahms said to me, with the pretence of a serious rebuke in his voice: "My dear Henschel, let me warn you to be more cautious when speaking of a nobleman's compositions, *for you can never know who did 'em!*"

We left Wiesbaden last night for Frankfort on the Main. On arriving at the old hotel where I had been in the habit of putting up, room No. 42 was allotted to us by one of the menials. While, however, we were sitting in the tap-room over a farewell bottle of Rhine-wine, the head-waiter, who knew us, came up to me, announcing that a far better room, No. 11, had been placed at our disposal. After a cozy chat, in the course of which, to my great delight, Brahms had asked me if I knew of a very remote, quiet spot, untrodden by excursionists, where, during the summer vacation we might spend a week or two together — we retired to room No. 11, and it was my instant and most ardent endeavor to go to sleep before Brahms did, as I knew from past experience that otherwise his impertinently healthy habit of snoring would mean death to any hope of sleep on my part.

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My delight at seeing him take up a book and read in bed was equaled only by my horror when, after a few minutes, I saw him blow out the light of his candle. A few seconds later the room was fairly ringing with the most unearthly noises issuing from his nasal and vocal organs. What should I do? I was in despair, for I wanted sleep, and, moreover, had to leave for Berlin early next morning. A sudden inspiration made me remember room No. 42. I got up, went downstairs to the lodge of the porter, whom, not without some difficulty, I succeeded in rousing from a sound sleep. Explaining cause and object, I made him open room No. 42 for me. After a good night's rest, I returned, early in the morning, to the room in which I had left Brahms.

He was awake and, affectionately looking at me, with the familiar little twinkle in his eye and mock seriousness in his voice, said to me, well knowing what had driven me away: "Oh, Henschel, when I awoke and found your bed empty, I said to myself, '*There! he's gone and hanged himself!*' But really, why didn't you throw a boot at me?"

The idea of my throwing a boot at Brahms!

During our hurried breakfast — Brahms, returning to Vienna, also had to take an early train — we again spoke of the coming summer, and he seemed rather attracted by the glowing description I gave him of the island of Rügen, in the Baltic Sea, which I had visited before and was very fond of, but which was quite unknown to him. So we parted with a hearty "Auf

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Wiedersehn," which made me very happy. I love him dearly.

*Sassnitz, on the island of Rügen,
Saturday, July 8, 1876.*

ARRIVED here last night. The diligence was delayed by one of the heaviest thunderstorms I can remember, and I did not pull up at the little hostelry, which also contains the post office, until half-past eleven; but in spite of the inclemency of the weather and the late hour, Brahms was there to welcome me and we had an hour's chat in the little coffee-room. Then he returned to his lodgings down in the village, whilst I came up here to the hotel on the Fahnberg, where, however, to my great delight, Brahms is going to have his mid-day and evening meals regularly.

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Sunday, July 9.

EARLY yesterday morning Brahms came up to go bathing with me. There was a fine surf on, and the temperature of the water being rather high we stayed in it for nearly half an hour, enjoying ourselves hugely. I greatly admired Brahms' burly, well-knit, muscular body, which is only rather too much inclined to stoutness, I fear.

In the water he drew my attention to the possibility of keeping one's eyes wide open when diving. It is not only possible, he said, but also very agreeable and strengthening for the eyes. I at once followed his advice to try, succeeding immediately, and we greatly amused ourselves by throwing little copper coins into the water and diving for them.

In the evening we sat together in the Fahrnberg. I showed him the new series of Moritz Hauptmann's letters.*

After we had read a few, he said: "How discreet one ought to be in writing letters. Who knows, some day they'll be printed. Now, there's hardly anything in these letters which would not read just as well if their contents were reversed. To be sure it is an agreeable gift to be able to write clever letters, but only let-

*Hauptmann was a composer, rather dry and academical, and up to his death, in 1868, cantor of the church of St. Thomas in Leipzig.

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ters of purely scientific purport are in my opinion of real value to any but those they are written to."

I drew Brahms' attention especially to one letter, written to Professor R.* I expressed my surprise at the lenient and amiable way in which Hauptmann spoke of that gentleman's compositions.

"Well," said Brahms, "you see, R. had very aristocratic connections and Hauptmann . . . a very delicate nature."

In the course of our talk one of the greatest virtuosos of the day, a personal friend of Brahms, was mentioned. "There are people," Brahms said, "who can talk and talk about the most unlikely, impossible thing until they actually believe it themselves. It's what I would called Twaddle. For instance, the other day, after having played the last movement of my 'C Minor Quartet,' in which a friend detected a certain resemblance to Mendelssohn's 'Trio in C Minor,' without realizing that what, there, is theme itself, is, with me, simply an accompanying figure, my friend asked me, — in all seriousness, mind, — 'Now, am I not right: you wanted to show what *you* could do with that theme?' How silly!"

Two stories which Brahms told me I write down as showing what a tender, sympathetic heart he has.

*An able, but decidedly mediocre composer of good birth, who at that time occupied a rather prominent position as teacher at one of the Musical State-institutions of Berlin.

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Both stories refer to Mr. N.* “With us in Vienna,” Brahms began, “it frequently occurs that the postmen, though officially obliged to deliver all letters at the doors of the respective flats to which they are addressed, leave them with the concierge of the house, who, as you know, always has his little lodgings in the souterrain. Well, Mr. N., who lived in the fourth floor, once received a letter in that way twenty-four hours later than he ought to have, if the postman had delivered it, according to his duty, at the door.

“Without warning, N. lodged an information against the offender with the general postmaster, who ordered the matter to be investigated. In the meantime a colleague of the poor postman had succeeded in persuading Mr. N.’s servant-girl to take the blame upon herself, since nothing could happen to her, whilst the postman, who was a married man with a family, would surely be dismissed. When, consequently, the post-office commissioners appeared at N.’s house to ascertain the exact facts of the case, the servant-girl stepped forward, boldly declaring it was she who had omitted to deliver the letter, which had been in her pocket those twenty-four hours. And the postman was saved.”

Brahms’ whole face beamed with joy as he told the story, and especially the action of the brave and generous girl he could not praise highly enough.

The second story is equally pathetic.

*A well-known writer and commentator on music, then living in Vienna.

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“N. and I,” said Brahms, “met at the same table in a certain coffee-house regularly on two or three evenings in the week, and it always used to embarrass me greatly when, on paying our bills, N. suspiciously scrutinized his, questioning the waiter as to this or that little item which he was not sure of having had, etc.

“One evening when this had happened again, the waiter came close up to N., and whispered into his ear, his voice trembling with excitement and indignation: ‘I beg of you, Mr. N., not to mistrust me; I could not live if I thought you doubted my honesty.’ Then he retired. N. got up without changing a muscle in his face, and left. A little later, when I went home myself, I gave the waiter an unusually large *douceur*, and said, ‘This . . . is . . . from the other gentleman as well.’”

Brahms is looking splendid. His solid frame, the healthy, dark-brown color of his face, the full hair, just a little sprinkled with gray, all make him appear the very image of strength and vigor. He walks about here just as he pleases, generally with his waistcoat unbuttoned and his hat in his hand, always with clean linen, but without collar or necktie. These he dons at table d’hôte only. His whole appearance vividly recalls some of the portraits of Beethoven. His appetite is excellent. He eats with great gusto and, in the evening, regularly drinks his three glasses of beer, never omitting, however, to finish off with his beloved Kaffee.

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July 10.

YESTERDAY afternoon I spent nearly three hours in Brahms' rooms. He showed me new songs of his, asking me if I could suggest a short way of indicating that a certain phrase in one of them was not his own.

"I have," he said, "taken a charming motive of Scarlatti's



as the theme of a song I composed to one of Goethe's poems, and should like to acknowledge my indebtedness. I proposed, as the best and simplest way, that he should merely place Scarlatti's name at the end of the phrase in question.*

He also showed me the manuscript of an unpublished song and the first movement of a Requiem Mass, both by Schubert, enthusiastically commenting on their beauty. The first two issues of the Bach Society's publication of cantatas were lying on his table, and he pointed out to me how badly the accompaniments were often arranged for the piano; how, in fact, the endeavor to bring out as nearly as possible every individual part

*This was done and the spirited, humorous song afterwards published as No. 5 of Op. 72 (Simrock).

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of the orchestra had rendered the arrangement well nigh unplayable for any but a virtuoso.

"The chief aim," he said, "of a pianoforte arrangement of orchestral accompaniments must always be to be easily playable. Whether the different parts move correctly, *i. e.*, in strict accordance with the rules of counterpoint, does not matter in the least."

Then we went together through the full score of Mozart's "Requiem," which he had undertaken to prepare for a new edition of that master's works. I admired the great trouble he had taken in the revision of the score. Every note of Süssmayer's was most carefully distinguished from Mozart's own.

It was a wonderful experience to have this man's company quite to myself for so long a time. During all these days Brahms has never spoken of anything which does not really interest him, never said anything superfluous or commonplace, except at the table d'hôte, where he purposely talks of hackneyed things, such as the weather, food, the temperature of the water, excursions, etc., etc.

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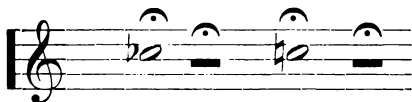
July 11.

I BOUGHT a strong hammock yesterday, and Brahms and I went into the lovely beech-wood and hung it up between two trees, on a spot from which through the foliage we could see the sea far below us. We both managed to climb into it simultaneously, an amusing, though by no means easy task to accomplish. After having comfortably established ourselves in it, we enjoyed a very cozy, agreeable hour or two of *dolce far niente*. Brahms was in an angelic mood, and went from one charming, interesting story to another, in which the gentler sex played a not unimportant part.

In the afternoon we resolved to go on an expedition to find *his* bullfrog pond, of which he had spoken to me for some days. His sense of locality not being very great, we walked on and on across long stretches of waste moorland. Often we heard the weird call of bullfrogs in the distance, but he would say: "No, that's not *my* pond yet," and on we walked. At last we found it, a tiny little pool in the midst of a wide plain grown with heather. We had not met a human being the whole way, and this solitary spot seemed out of the world altogether.

"Can you imagine," Brahms began, "anything more sad and melancholy than this music, the undefinable sounds of which for ever and ever move within the pitiable compass of a diminished third?"

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“Here we can realize how fairy tales of enchanted princes and princesses have originated. . . . Listen! There he is again, the poor King’s-son with his yearning, mournful C flat!” *

We stretched ourselves out in the low grass, — it was a very warm evening, — lighted cigarettes and lay listening in deepest silence, not a breath of wind stirring, for fully half an hour. Then we leaned over the pond, caught tiny little baby frogs and let them jump into the water again from a stone, which greatly amused Brahms, especially when the sweet little creatures, happy to be in their element once more, hurriedly swam away, using their nimble little legs most gracefully and according to all the rules of the natatory art. When they thought themselves quite safe, Brahms would tenderly catch one up again in his hand, and heartily laugh with pleasure on giving it back its freedom. . . .

During our walk homeward, we spoke almost exclusively of musical matters, and he said: “You must practice more gymnastics, my dear, four-part songs,

* It is interesting to note that in Brahms’ songs dating from this period this interval frequently occurs.

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variations, string quartets, etc.; that will be beneficial to your opera, too.” *

As we parted for the night, he called after me: “Come for me tomorrow morning, to go bathing; and bring new songs, Gerda score, or other beautiful things.” (How he *does* like to tease!) So this morning I brought him three new songs of mine.

The afternoon was again spent in the hammock, and on the way home we came to talk of Wagner’s trilogy, “The Ring of the Nibelungs.” I had just spoken of some, to me, especially beautiful places in the first act of “The Valkyrie,” and of the fresh and breezy song of Siegfried in “Siegfried” “From the wood forth into the world fare.”

“Certainly,” he said, “these are fine things, but I can’t help it, somehow or other, they do not interest me. What you just hummed



is no doubt beautiful; and when Siegmund in the Valkyrie pulls the sword out of the tree, that’s fine, too; but it would, in my opinion, be *really* powerful and carry one away, if it all concerned — let us say, young Buonaparte, or some other hero who stands nearer to our sensibilities, has a closer claim to our affection.

* I was engaged at that time in writing a very tragic opera, “Gerda” !

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And then that stilted, bombastic language." He took a copy of the text-book. "Listen:"

An Brünnhild's Felsen
Fahret vorbei:
Der dort noch lodert,
Weiset Loge nach Walhall!
Denn der Götter Ende
Dämmert nun auf;
So — werf' ich den Brand
In Walhall's prangende Burg.*

He recited the words with greatly exaggerated pathos. "If I read this to a counting-house clerk, I am sure it would make a tremendous impression: 'So — werf' — ich den Brand — . . . I do not understand this kind of thing. What really does happen with the ring? Do *you* know? And those endless and tedious duets! Look at even Goethe's 'Tasso,' a masterpiece of the first rank. Every word there is pure gold; yet the long duets in it, though fine reading, prevent the play from being interesting as a drama."

*By Brynhild's rock then
Take ye the road.
Who still there flameth,
Loge, show him to Walhall.
For the end of the Gods
Is dawning at last;
Thus — throw I the torch
Into Walhall's glittering walls.

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July 12.

I WENT to Brahms' rooms last night. He had been reading, but, putting away his book, gave me a cordial welcome and began looking through my new manuscript songs. He took up the one in E flat "Where Angels linger," * and said, "Now there is a charming song. In some of the others you seem to me too easily satisfied. One ought never to forget that by actually perfecting *one* piece one gains and learns more than by commencing or half-finishing a dozen. Let it rest, let it rest, and keep going back to it and working at it over and over again, until it is completed as a finished work of art, until there is not a note too much or too little, not a bar you could improve upon. Whether it is *beautiful* also, is an entirely different matter, but perfect it *must* be. You see, I am rather lazy, but I never cool down over a work, once begun, until it is perfected, unassailable."

Thus he continued speaking, drawing, in the most amiable way, my attention to this little defect, that little blemish, so that I sat happy and silent, careful not to interrupt this to me so precious lesson.

*Afterwards published in Op. 34 (Bote & Bock).

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July 13.

I ASKED him yesterday if he had thought of going to the inauguration performances of "The Nibelungs' Ring" at Bayreuth in August. "I am afraid," he said, "it's too expensive. I have repeatedly heard 'Rheingold' and 'Walküre' at München, and confess it would greatly interest me, but—well, we'll think of it."

Then, taking up the volume of Hauptmann's letters I had lent him, and pointing to one of them, he said: "Just look; do you see these asterisks instead of a name?" I did, and read the whole sentence, which described a certain composer, indicated by the asterisks, as a rather haughty young man. "*That's me*," said Brahms amusedly. "When I was a very young man I remember playing, at Göttingen, my 'Sonata in C' to Hauptmann. He was not very complimentary about it, in fact, had much fault to find with it, which I, a very modest youth at that time, accepted in perfect silence. I afterwards heard that this silence had been interpreted and complained of, as haughtiness. I confess, the more I read of these letters, the clearer it becomes to me that they are written with a certain consciousness of importance. Beethoven would have laughed if any one, seeing in one of his letters a remark on any subject whatever, had taken this as proving the justice of such remark. But there are people—take, for instance, Varnhagen—who, never having accomplished anything



*Brahms as a Boy, after a pencil drawing by
Frau Moritz Hauptmann in Leipsic*

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really great themselves, sit down at their writing desks in a peevish, sulky temper, pulling to pieces—even when praising—everything they can lay hold of. To twaddle about Bach or Beethoven, as is done in the letters to Hauser, in a chattering, feuilletonistic way, is wholly unnecessary: they stand too firm for that kind of thing.”

July 14.

LAST evening we sat downstairs in the coffee room, having supper, when suddenly some one in the adjoining dining-hall began to play Chopin's Study in A Flat on the piano. I sprang up, intending to put a stop to it, and exclaiming, “*Oh, these women!*” when Brahms said, “No, my dear, this is no woman.” I went into the hall to look, and found he was right. “Yes,” he said, “in this respect I am hardly ever mistaken; and it is by no means an easy thing to distinguish, by the sense of hearing alone, a feminine man from a masculine woman!”

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July 15.

YESTERDAY morning I took to Brahms the orchestral score of Wagner's "Götterdämmerung." In the afternoon he said to me, "*Why* did you bring it to me?" (He had particularly asked me for it!) "The thing interests, and fascinates one, and yet, properly speaking, is not always pleasant. With the 'Tristan' score it is different. If I look at that in the morning, I am cross for the rest of the day." *

. . . Today I read out, from a Berlin paper, the news of the death, at Bayreuth, of a member of the

*I well remember my wondering at the time just what meaning Brahms intended to convey by these words. My old friend, Herr Max Kalbeck, editor of the *Neues Tagblatt* in Vienna, who published the excerpts from my diary referred to in the preface to this little volume, makes the following comment on them:

"This sentence needs an explanation, since it could easily be interpreted as meaning that 'Tristan,' in contrast to the 'not always pleasant' Ring of the Nibelungs, had pleased Brahms very much, so much, indeed, that it made him cross out of envy. We know from personal experience that Brahms, though warmly acknowledging the many musical beauties of the work, had a particular dislike for 'Tristan,' and as to envy, he never in his life envied anyone. In Wagner he admired, above all, the magnitude of his intentions and the energy in carrying them out. The Bayreuth Festival Theatre he hailed as a national, all-German affair. We believe the chief reason why Brahms never went to Bayreuth is to be found in the circumstance that the performances always happened at a season when he, after long and arduous creative work, was wont to give himself up entirely to the recreation of an out-of-door life in the country."

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Wagner orchestra. "*The first corpse*," said Brahms, dryly.

In celebration of the sixth anniversary of the declaration of war * we ordered a bottle of champagne. We had talked ourselves into a tremendous patriotism, and Brahms told me that his first thought, when the war was declared, was to go to Mme. Schumann, who resided, without the protection of a man, at Baden-Baden.

"So great was my enthusiasm," he said, "that I was firmly resolved to join, after the first great defeat, the army as a volunteer, fully convinced that I should meet my old father there to fight side by side with me. Thank God! it turned out differently."

*Between France and Germany.

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July 17.

YESTERDAY I was with Brahms from noon until eleven at night without interruption. He was in excellent spirits. We had our swim in the sea together, and again found much amusement in diving for little red pebbles. After the mid-day dinner Brahms was lying in my room, in the hammock which I had secured between window and door, while I read to him Meilhac's amusing comedy, "L'Attaché." After the usual coffee at a coffee-house on the beach, we went for a long stroll in the Hansemann Park, near Crampas, the nearest village. We spoke, among other things, of Carl Loewe. Brahms thinks highly of his ballads and Servian songs. "However, with us in Vienna," he said, "Loewe is, to my regret, much over-rated. One places him, in his songs, side by side with, in his ballads, above, Schubert, and overlooks the fact that what with the one is genius, with the other is merely talented craft. . . .

"In writing songs," he cautioned me, "you must endeavor to invent, simultaneously with the melody, a healthy, powerful bass. You stick too much to the middle parts. In that song in E Flat, for instance —" he again referred to "Where Angels linger" — "you have hit upon a very charming middle part, and the melody, too, is very lovely, but that isn't all, is it? And then, my dear friend, let me counsel you: no heavy dissonances on the unaccentuated parts of the bar, please! That is weak. I am very fond of dissonances, you'll



Clara Schumann at the age of fifty

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agree, but on the heavy, accentuated parts of the bar, and then let them be resolved easily and gently."

Speaking of Schubert's setting of Goethe's songs, he said "Schubert's Suleika songs are to me the only instances where the power and beauty of Goethe's words have been enhanced by the music. All other of Goethe's poems seem to me so perfect in themselves that no music can improve them." *

Passing from music to literature, he remarked: "Paul Heyse used to be one of the most charming men imaginable. He was beautiful and exceptionally amiable, and I hardly know of any one who, suddenly entering a room, would illuminate it, so to speak, by his personality in the way Heyse did.

"Bodenstedt is greatly over-rated. His poetry is my special aversion. Geibel, on the other hand, seems to me not appreciated enough.

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Perhaps I may be allowed here to interrupt the diary for a moment, and to draw the reader's attention to the discretion and judiciousness with which Brahms selected the words for his songs.

If we look at the texts to his vocal music, of which there exists a vast mass, we shall find that the sources—individual or national—from which he drew his in-

*An opinion which, with all deference to the master, I cannot share. To me there is no sentiment expressed in words which music, *i. e.*, the right music, cannot enhance.

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spiration, have in themselves been, to a greater or lesser degree, inspired. All his songs, duets, quartets, etc., are set to beautiful, significant, worthy poems; truly a wonderful lesson to modern composers.

If one of the chief aims of art be to elevate, *i. e.*, to raise mankind for the time being above the commonplace routine of life, above paltry everyday thoughts and cares, in short, from things earthy to things celestial, surely such aim should be discernible even in the smallest form of the expression of art.

Just as the beauties of nature, testifying to the incomprehensible greatness of the divine power, reveal themselves as convincingly in a little primrose as in the huge trees of the Yosemite Valley, in the sweet prattling of a little brooklet as in the roaring thunder of the Niagara, in the lovely undulations of the Scottish hills as in the awe-inspiring heights of the Himalayas, so beauty of soul, honesty of purpose, purity of mind, can shine as brightly in the shortest song as in the longest symphony.

No true artist then in the realm of music will debase his muse by wedding it to sentimental trash as far removed from poetry as a mole-hill from Mount Parnassus, though it often be a difficult task, especially for young people, to distinguish sentimentality from sentiment.

The former may be described as superficial, aimless pity; affected, unreal, unwholesome emotion. Senti-

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ment on the other hand is true emotion; is the feeling that grows naturally out of the sympathetic contemplation of a thing; and the sentiment it is, not the thing, which we ought to look for, even in a little song, in the first place, as a fit object for poetic and musical expression.

A true artist's spirit will not allow itself to be moved by versifications of penny-a-line newspaper reports, such as the capsizing of a little pleasure boat with two hapless lovers in it, or the death by starvation of a poor old seamstress ready to meet her lover in heaven, or effusions of a similar kind, generally ending in pseudo-religious inferences and exhortations little short of blasphemy.

The standing of the pale, hungry little boy outside the window of a confectioner's shop and observing inside the shop the rich, ruddy little boy eating his fill, that is not poetry, even if put into faultless verse and rhyme, but simply a fact, and a sad one, too, the contemplation of which might, in a fine poetic mind, produce the most beautiful sentiments of compassion with the sufferings of our fellow-creatures, of tenderness, of love; but to let the poor little chap march straightway to heaven, to the fortissimo accompaniment of triplets on the last page of an up-to-date ballad, that is sentimentality, and cruel mockery into the bargain.

I well remember what fun Brahms and I had in later years when I showed him some specimens of the typical popular English ballad and how we laughed—

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especially over the sad ones! But to return to the rest of the journal.

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After supper we sat, quite alone in the dark on the terrace of the Fahrnberg. Soon our conversation took a more serious turn. He spoke of friendship and of men, and how, properly speaking, he believed very little in either.

"How few true men there are in the world!" he exclaimed. "The two Schumanns, Robert and Clara, there you have two true, beautiful '*Menschenbilder*' (images of man). Knowledge, achievement, power, position — nothing can outweigh this: to be a beautiful *Menschenbild*. Do you know Allgeyer in München? * There you have one, too." And then he began to talk with touching warmth of the time when, in Allgeyer's house at Karlsruhe, he wrote his "Mainacht" and the D minor movement of his "Requiem." . . . "I sometimes regret," he said to me after some moments of silence, "that I did not marry. I ought to have a boy of ten now; that *would* be nice. But when I was of the right age for marrying I lacked the position to do so, and now it is too late."

Speaking of this had probably revived in him reminiscences of his own boyhood, for he continued: "Only

*An engraver and photographer with a great love for music; the intimate friend of the painter Anselm Feuerbach, and one of a small circle of musicians, painters, and poets then living in Munich, and comprising, among others, Hermann Levi, Franz Lenbach, Paul Heyse, and Wilhelm Busch.



*Allegeyer (on the left), Brahms and Hermann Levi
in Munich in the early seventies*

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once in my life have I played truant and shirked school, and that was the vilest day of my life. When I came home my father had already been informed of it, and I got a solid hiding."

"But still," he said, "my father was a dear old man, very simple-minded and most unsophisticated, of which qualities I must give you an amusing illustration:

"You know he was a double-bass player in the Municipal Orchestra of Hamburg, and in his leisure hours tried to increase his scanty little income by copying music.

"He was sitting in his room at the top of the house some fine day, with the door wide open, absorbed in writing out the parts from an orchestral score, when in walked a tramp, begging. My father looked up at him quickly, without interrupting his work, and, in his very pronounced Hamburg dialect, said:

"'I cannot give you anything, my dear man. Besides, don't you know it's very wrong of you to come into a room like this? How easily might you not have taken my overcoat that's hanging in the hall! Get out, and don't you do it again!'

"The tramp humbly apologized and withdrew.

"When, a few hours later, my father wanted to go out for a walk, the overcoat of course had disappeared."

Brahms then touched upon his relations to the members of his family, and told me he still supported his old stepmother. With his sister he had little in common; their interests had always been too far apart. Between

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his brother, whom he had likewise supported, and himself, there existed no intercourse whatever. . . .

The other day I happened to hum the theme of the *Andante* from his *Quartet in C minor*. He seemed rather to like my doing so, for when it came to the place



he accompanied my humming with gentle movements of his hand, as if beating time to it. At last he smilingly said: "I am not at all ashamed to own that it gives me the keenest pleasure if a song, an *adagio*, or anything of mine, has turned out particularly good. How must those gods: Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, have felt, whose daily bread it was to write things like the *St. Matthew Passion*, *Don Giovanni*, *Fidelio*, *Ninth Symphony*! What I cannot understand is how people like myself can be vain. As much as we men, who walk upright, are above the creeping things of the earth, so these gods are above us. If it were not so ludicrous it would be loathsome to me to hear colleagues of mine praise me to my face in such an exaggerated manner."

Thus he went on; it was no longer modesty, it was humility, and I took good care not to disturb his mood by a single word.

Soon, however, he smiled again, and remarked, among other things, that he considered the *Agitato* from

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his still unpublished "Quartet in B Flat" the most amorous, affectionate thing he had written.

When we parted that night, he said: "You *will* write me from Bayreuth, won't you? I know you will rave about it, and I don't blame you. I myself must confess 'Walküre' and 'Götterdämmerung' have a great hold on me. For 'Rheingold' and 'Siegfried' I do not particularly care. If I only knew what becomes of the Ring and what Wagner means by it! Perhaps the cross? Hebbel, in his 'Nibelunge,' has dared it, and perhaps it was Wagner's meaning too. I am by no means a fanatic as to my devotion to the cross, but that, at least, would be an idea — thus to indicate the termination of the reign of the gods."

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July 18.

YESTERDAY, when, after our usual swim, we leisurely strolled to the Fahrnberg for dinner, a button on Brahms' shirt suddenly came off.

As it was the one which served to hold the collar in its place, Brahms was greatly embarrassed. I proposed to help him out, and we went to my room, where I took out of my valise a little box containing sewing materials which my mother had given me to carry with me when traveling. The amusing situation of my sewing the button on to Brahms' shirt while he had it on, again recalled memories of his youth. "When *I* went on my first journey," he said, laughingly, "my mother also put such a little box into my bag, and showed me how to use its contents. But I remember quite well, when I tore a hole in my trousers, I repaired it with sealing wax! It didn't last long, though."

At luncheon, as it was my last day, we again indulged in a bottle of champagne. In the afternoon, the other guests having partly retired to their rooms, partly gone on excursions, Brahms played the accompaniments to some songs for me. Since our arrival this was the first time that he had touched the keyboard and that I had sung. I began with Brahms' "Mainacht," then came a Schubert song, and then Beethoven's cyclus "To the Absent Beloved." When we had ended we were surprised to find that all of the adjoining rooms had filled with listeners. Mine host of the Fahrnberg was greatly

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touched, and thanked Brahms for the honor he had done to his house.

In the train to Berlin, July 19.

THIS morning, at five o'clock, I left Sassnitz. Strangely enough, it again poured in torrents as on the night of my arrival. A horrid, chilly morning. Brahms was up at the Fahrberg a little before five, and, to my delight, accompanied me in the diligence as far as Lancken, some three miles from Sassnitz. There he got out, we shook hands, and parted. For a long time I looked after him out of the carriage window in spite of the wind and the still pouring rain. It was a picture never to be forgotten. As far as the eye could reach, nothing but moor, and clouds, and — Brahms.

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HERE closes the journal. During the twenty-one years of undisturbed friendship that followed, our intercourse had to be mostly by letter, and our meetings fewer and further between; the channel, and, later on, the Atlantic, separating us bodily.

After Brahms, in 1878, had considerably changed his outward appearance by the growth of the long and flowing beard in the frame of which his face has become familiar to the last and present generations, our first meeting was marked by an amusing little incident, illustrative of his ever-abiding love of fun.

At the end of that year I was engaged upon an extended recital tour through Austria and Hungary, together with my friend Ignaz Brüll, the composer and pianist. We commenced in Vienna. Having arrived only a day or two previous to the first recital I had not seen Brahms as yet. At the end of the concert Brüll and I were receiving, in the artists' room, the congratulations of friends, when suddenly I saw a man unknown to me, rather stout, of middle height, with long hair and full beard, coming up toward me. In a very deep and hoarse voice he introduced himself "Musikdirector Müller," making a very stiff and formal bow, which I was on the point of returning with equal gravity, when, an instant later, we all found ourselves heartily laughing at the perfect success of Brahms' disguise, for, of course, he it was. . . .

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Of subsequent reunions, two have been especially vividly impressed on my mind. In order that my wife, who hitherto had only occasionally met this great and admired friend, should have an opportunity of knowing him more familiarly, she and I traveled to Vienna, in 1894, for the sole purpose of spending a few days in Brahms' company.

"For once, dear friend," he had written to me on my announcing our visit, "Simrock is right.* I am not the last, nor by any means the only one rejoiced at the prospect of your coming. Heartily welcome then, and may it be a cheerful meeting!"

On our arrival in Vienna, rather late in the evening of April 23d, we found a note from Brahms awaiting us at our hotel: "If not too tired after your journey, do come to us, quite close by, at the restaurant of the 'Musik-Verein'; just as you are, informally, in your traveling clothes." Who could resist the temptation? Arrived at the indicated place, we found a little party of men and women, mostly members of the "Tonkünstler-Verein" (Tone-Artists' Union), gathered together in a social way, as usual, after one of their weekly concerts. Brahms, surrounded, as always on such occasions, by a host of admiring ladies, young and elderly, to whose charms and homage his susceptibilities had not

*This was meant facetiously. Fritz Simrock, Brahms' publisher, was, and remained to the end, the most trusted and highly valued of his friends.

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by any means lessened with the advancing years, was in excellent spirits and received us most cordially.

If, however, truth must be told, his jokes — and he was very fond of them — were not always characterized by that sense of delicacy which the presence of ladies should have made desirable; and one lady at least there was — need I name her? — who on such occasions did not join in the general chorus of amused acclamation, ready though she, too, was to forgive much to the composer of the “Mainacht” and of the “German Requiem.”

Early the following morning we went to his rooms. He received us, as was his wont with friends, irrespective of sex, attired in a short jacket of which the lowest button only was put to its proper use; without waistcoat or shirt collar, and in slippers. The coffee-machine — he always made his own coffee in the morning — was still standing on the table; the air of the large, yet cosy room was filled with the delicious fragrance peculiar to Viennese coffee; the sun shone brightly through the large windows and the whole atmosphere was one of quiet, inward happiness, contentment, and ease.

Soon our host commenced to ransack drawers, cupboards, shelves for things he thought might interest and entertain us, when suddenly, with that dear, familiar twinkle in his eyes and a long-drawn “A-a-ah!” he motioned us to quickly settle down to a treat which apparently he had in store for us. Then, smilingly and with mock ceremoniousness, he opened a large portfolio

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and showed and read to us, with great gusto, the famous letters of Richard Wagner to the milliner. He had bought the collection recently and seemed very proud of the precious possession, chuckling with amusement as he went from one amazing letter to the other.

After a few days of charming intercourse with him and our mutual friends Ignaz Brüll, Max Kalbeck, Carl Goldmark, and Johann Strauss, the famous composer of the "Blue Danube" walse, which Brahms often protested he would have given much to have written himself, we left Vienna; and only once more was I privileged to see the great man in the flesh.

That was in January, 1896, when Brahms, Edvard Grieg, Arthur Nikisch, and myself spent a delightful evening together at one of the favorite restaurants of Leipsic.

Brahms, rather stouter, it seemed to me, than I had ever seen him before, was in the merriest of moods and did ample justice to the excellent beer of Munich brew, of which he consumed an astounding quantity before we parted, long after midnight.

Nothing seemed to indicate the approach of the mortal disease which was to take hold of him so soon afterwards, and little did Nikisch and I dream that night that our next meeting would be among the mourners at Brahms' funeral.

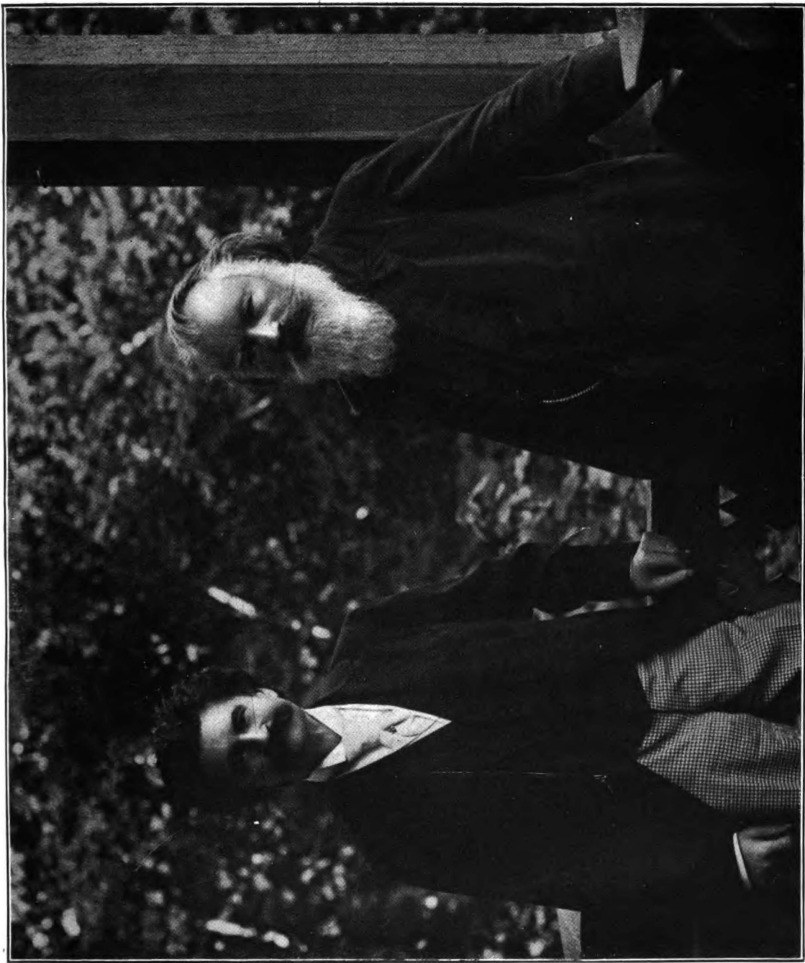
It was in the evening of April the 3d, 1897, that I arrived in Vienna, too late to see the dear friend alive. He had breathed his last that morning.

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I hurried to the death-chamber which had been transformed into a *chapelle ardente*. The arrangements usual in Catholic countries: a plentiful display of silver crosses on draperies of black velvet; huge brass candelabra on which huge wax candles were burning, presented a strange contrast to the simplicity of the life and habits of the master (who had been a Protestant), and it was only the beautiful flowers which Love and Admiration had piled up in great and fragrant masses on the floor beneath the canopy until they reached high above the coffin, almost completely hiding it from sight, that somewhat reconciled one to the inappropriateness of the official decoration of the room.

The Tuesday following, April 6th, was the day of the funeral. As if Nature had wished to present an image of the character of the master's music, combining, as it does, the gentle with the severe, cold winds of winter alternated with balmy breezes of spring.

From early morning on, friends and deputations, carrying wreaths and flowers and palm-branches, followed each other in constant succession up the three familiar flights of stairs to the master's apartments, and the place before the house of mourning in the Karls-gasse began to fill with people ready to join in the procession. By noon nearly the whole of the street, and the open space in front of the adjoining Karlskirche, were one mass of humanity. All musical Vienna seemed assembled, and the extraordinarily large number of eminent men and women who had come from far and near



Brahms and Johann Strauss on the verandah of the latter's villa in Vienna

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to pay their last tribute of Love and Devotion to what had been mortal of Johannes Brahms must have conveyed some idea of his greatness and popularity even to those who hitherto had perhaps not quite realized either.

One could not help being reminded of the historical answer the old peasant woman gave to the stranger who had happened to arrive in Vienna on the day of *Beethoven's* funeral: "Whose funeral is this?" the wondering stranger had asked. "Why, don't you know?" was the answer, "They are a-buryin' the *General of the Musicians!*"

At last the coffin with its precious load appeared in the doorway. Every head uncovered. Amid reverential and most impressive silence it was lifted onto the open funeral car. To its lid were fastened two wreaths of gigantic proportions, sent, the one by the composer's native city, the free town of Hamburg, the other by the corporation of Vienna, the home of his adoption, and the procession, headed by a standard-bearer in old Spanish costume, riding on a black horse, started on its melancholy journey.

The rather lugubrious impression created by the six riders in similar attire, who, also mounted on coal-black horses and carrying lighted tapers on long poles, followed the standard-bearer, was relieved by a wonderful sight: a succession of six high, open funeral cars, each freighted to the very top with an abundance of beautiful fresh flowers, laurels, palms; their many-colored ribbons floating down to the ground. The sun, which had come

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

out gloriously by that time, shone, as it were, on a gigantic moving garden; a spectacle as lovely as it was solemn. Before the building of the "Society of the Friends of Music," the procession halted. The doors and pillars were draped in black cloth. On either side of the portal, from metal bowls, resting on the top of high candelabra and filled with ignited spirit of wine, blue flames were flickering with a subdued, mystical light. From underneath a canopy the "Sing-Verein," which so often had sung under the inspiring direction of the master, now sang his own beautiful part-song "Farewell" (op. 93 A. No. 4).

As the lovely strains rang out into the vernal air, there could be heard from the neighboring trees the merry twittering of birds whose song seemed to have been kindled by the unwonted occurrence no less than by the approach of spring. At last, after a short choral service in the old church in the Dorotheër Gasse, the cemetery was reached. Another touching farewell, another song—and the mortal remains of Johannes Brahms were lowered into their last resting place, close to those of Beethoven and Schubert.

There have at all times lived great artists who have been small men. In Brahms both the man and the artist aspired to high and lofty ideals. It never was his aim or ambition to gain for himself—through cheap and dazzling play with tones or "catching" tunes, the quickly withering crowns of popular favor.



Brahms on his Death-bed

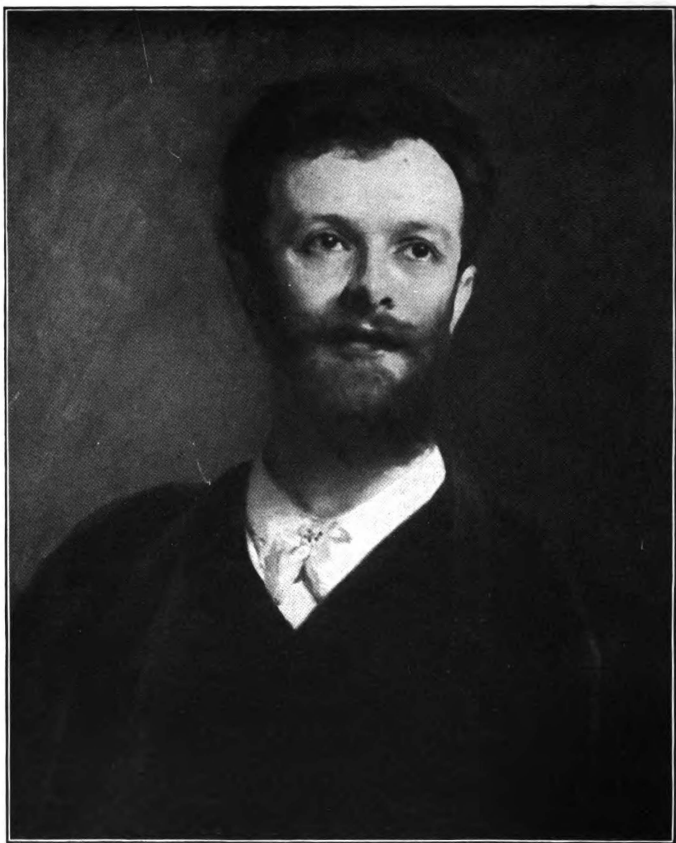
RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

Though undisguisedly delighted when finding himself appreciated and acclaimed, he coveted neither fame nor applause. He was of a very simple, kind, child-like disposition. He loved children, whom — poor or rich — to make happy, was to himself a source of pure happiness.

He loved the poor, to whom his heart went out in sympathy and pity. He hated show of charity. But where he could comfort in silence those who suffered in silence, those who struggled against undeserved misfortune, the sick and the helpless, there the man, so modest, sparing, and unpretentious in his own wants, became a benefactor, ready for sacrifice. No better summing up of Brahms' character and personality can conclude this little volume than that contained in the words of his old friend Franz Wüllner of Cologne: He has left us a precious inheritance, the noble example of a rare truthfulness and simplicity in art and life; of a relentless severity toward himself, of a hatred of self-conceit and pretence; of a high-minded, inflexible, unwavering, artistic conviction. To him may be truly applied Goethe's fine words in his Epilogue to Schiller's "Lay of the Bell":

"With mighty steps his soul advanced
Toward the ever True — Good — Beautiful."

SOME LETTERS
FROM
JOHANNES BRAHMS
TO
GEORGE HENSCHEL



*George Henschel in 1889
after the Painting by John S. Sargent, R.A.*

I.

(To Berlin)

Rüschlikon, near Zürich, August, 1874.

MY DEAR SIR:

I beg leave to venture the question whether you would care to sing in Vienna, viz: on April 18th next in Bruch's *Odysseus*? To be sure I could offer you a honorarium of only 200 florins in silver, but might be able, should you so desire, to add a trifle more which we could call "traveling expenses."

My idea would be that you give a concert on your own account besides, and by doing so complete what I hope will be a snug little sum.

Artistic coöperation you will have no difficulty in finding—I myself hope to be "in sufficiently good finger" to offer my services.

Max Bruch was here a few days ago and very pleased to hear I intended to ask you to sing in his work. Would you kindly send me a line? The two Music-Festivals you missed were very fair and afforded me the opportunity of getting stranded here on the shores of the lake of Zürich, which I am very fond of.

Excuse haste and accept best greetings.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

II.

(To Berlin)

Vienna, Nov., 1874.

MY DEAR SIR:

You have placed the month of April at my disposal for Austria. Could that period not be stretched a little? Could you not sing for us on the Tuesday of Holy Week — March 23d — in the St. Matthew-Passion?

After that you might give concerts here and elsewhere and sing Odysseus on April 18th? A modest 200 florins for each of the two concerts.

I fear, though, you will have a dozen invitations for Holy Week already.

Do write me a line, and if you could possibly agree, I think it would be a good thing in every respect. By the middle of April all concert-giving comes to an end here and in Budapesth.

From Dunkl * I had an invitation yesterday for December 2d to play my Piano Concerto, but cannot accept. I shall again invite Bruch, as I have beaten 150 florins for him out of the directors, which seemed to me necessary and only decent. It would be charming if he would take part in your own concerts, be it as composer or by accompanying the songs.

Let me hear from you, and accept best greetings.

* A celebrated amateur, music publisher, and concert "entrepreneur" in Budapesth.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

III.

(To Berlin)

Vienna, Nov., 1874.

I am extraordinarily curious to hear about the performance of Hercules * and expect beautiful things and beautiful results.

I should be glad to know if Joachim, on the Wednesday after our concert, would like to give another here. I have conditionally taken the small hall of the "Society of the Friends of Music." Perhaps you would not mind asking him and write me just one word, so that eventually I need not pay for the hall in vain?

Greetings to everybody.

*On November 18, 1874, Joachim had conducted an eagerly and long-looked-for performance of Händel's "Hercules" in Berlin, Madame Joachim singing the part of Dejanira, I the title part. It proved so great a success that it was quickly followed by two repetitions, one at the command of the old Emperor William taking place at the White Hall of the Castle in Berlin. At the Düsseldorf Festival of 1875 it was likewise produced under Joachim's conductorship and with the Berlin cast.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

IV.

(To Berlin)

Vienna, Feb., 1875.

MY DEAR SIR:

Three Arias in the Passion-Music are at present not in our orchestral parts.

Of your recitatives I propose omitting none. . . .
. . . . You will have heard from Simrock how fearfully crowded we are with concerts here. Though having made a note of the few days on which you could sing here after the Passion, I have not dared yet to actually engage the hall.

In order, however, to get at the desired traveling expenses I would make and recommend the following proposal:

On Saturday, March 20th, we have a sort of concert here, called "Artists' Evening"; my society and I myself take part in it. Would you like to sing a few songs, twice during the evening, and accept 20 gold ducats for it?

Dessoff * or I would accompany you. From the papers I see you sing Loewe and would recommend as one of your numbers his "Henry the Fowler." At any rate you must sing songs with which you can create the greatest *furore*, for this would be your first appearance here before a crowded house and we must make a big hit at once.

*At the time conductor of the Court Opera.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

I have (*must* have) my two rehearsals on Friday and Monday at 3 o'clock. Will you be here on Friday!?!?

I think I may leave the question of an eventual own concert until you come.

Your congratulations on my birthday I accept gratefully, though they come two months too early — the fault, I think, of this year's musical calendar.

Please write soon and send proposals of songs.

In haste yours

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

V.

(To Vienna)

Vienna, March, 1875.

“Heartily welcome in Vienna!” If I only knew when and by what train you arrived, I should prefer saying it to you in person.

The way into the town leads you past my house. At any rate let me know of your arrival immediately, especially should that be tonight, Friday, as we ought to consult together about tomorrow!

Best greetings.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

VI.

(To St. Petersburg *) *Vienna, April, 1875.*

DEAR H.

I call that bad luck — but might have thought of it! When you read the enclosed † you will understand that it would be rather indelicate on my part, were I to insist on *our* concert. I also should not like to open a back-door by pretending the concert to be *your* own and I only taking part in it. But, as I said before, it might have occurred to both of us!

Now, I should be extremely sorry if this were to make a disagreeable hole in your calendar! But — again — we ought to have considered beforehand how my gentlemen would hardly be likely to pay me a good salary and then have me give concerts of my own *besides!* . . .

Today I shall fetch your “Danziger” ‡ from the Custom House! . . .

*Whither I had gone to fulfil several engagements between the performances in Vienna of the *Passion* and *Odysseus*.

†The directors of the Society of the Friends of Music had not quite liked the idea of Brahms giving a concert before conducting “*Odysseus*” for them.

‡A famous brand of liqueur, called “Danziger Gold-wasser” (*Dantzic Gold-water*), of which I had sent Brahms a few bottles, knowing he was very fond of it.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

If only I took greater pleasure in the giving of concerts, I might write down a number of plans, but I have to actually force myself to every public appearance.

Write soon and don't be angry with

Yours heartily

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

VII.

(To Berlin)

Sassnitz, Island of Ruegen, July 2, 1876.

. . . I shall remain here at least until the 15th; beyond that I should not like to say anything definite.

Now I should find it charming if you could soon decide on coming.

We shall not disturb each other in the least. For you the place swarms with ladies. In *your* free hours you can *compose* songs for them, the badness of which I in turn will *expose* in *my* free hours!

It is quite beautiful here and the bathing enchanting.

Mine host of the Fahrnberg has already inquired after you.

Then announce further and good things to

Yours

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

VIII.

(To Zürich)

Vienna, Dec., 1877.

. . . Only "quite perhaps" shall I conduct my C-minor Symphony in Hamburg on January 18th and 22d.

I hardly think I shall allow myself to be persuaded to give concerts; but to listen, to rejoice, and afterwards to drink with you — all that I do to perfection.

I envy you being able to stroll about the shores of the lovely lake!

(Ballads I have several, but they all call for more than just one baritone!)

Your hurried

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

IX.

(To London)

Vienna, 1878.

DEAR FRIEND:

Eighteen volumes! * And that should not be worth the trouble of writing a letter? But poor man that I am, how heavily I feel the responsibility which rests on me! Can I ever hope by a few last volumes to justify all previous ones?

Following your example I will now keep silence regarding everything I could say. I think, however, we may meet at Düsseldorf during Whitsuntide. † (Your nineteenth volume ‡ will have its turn there, too!) Only briefly therefore let me answer some of your interrogation-points; upon the whole I prefer talking and am therefore looking forward to Düsseldorf. The score of Volume XIX has not been in England, but Pohl, § the gentle traitor, has confessed to me that, bribed by some Englishmen, he had been making secret notes of it from the parts during rehearsals!

The songs in the edition for low voice are still in the hands of the copyist, perhaps in those of the engraver already.

*I had written Brahms that the number of bound volumes of his works then in my library already amounted to eighteen.

†On the occasion of the Nether-Rhenish Music Festival.

‡Meaning his second Symphony in D.

§Richard Pohl, a well-known writer on music and critic.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

As to the new things I am writing, you had better continue relying on your informant; he decidedly knows more about it than I myself.

But to England I shall not easily be persuaded to come. I have too great an aversion to concerts and similar disquietudes.

It has nothing whatever to do with the question whether I like English politics or English globe-trotters or not. The latter, however, are now being successfully outdone by the North-Germans—from Berlin especially.

The Händel Arias * you will perhaps have in your valise in Düsseldorf. I have myself about a hundred of them—but am afraid my not altogether superabundant interest in them will not be particularly enhanced by seeing how others too . . . well, this sentence will never get straight again!

Au revoir, I hope. Here is my address: Pörschach am See, Kärnthen. Let me know if you, the Händel Arias, the famous E-flat song,† a fiancée, etc., etc., are coming.

With kindest greetings, yours,

*I had been commissioned by Dr. Crysander, editor-in-chief of the Händel Society, to arrange the bass arias from Händel's Italian operas with a pianoforte accompaniment for the society. Brahms had undertaken to do the same in regard to the tenor arias.

†“Where Angels Linger.” Brahms loved to chaff me with this particular song.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

X.

(To London)

Vienna, 1879.

. . . The principal point of interest to you is that Richter * the other day asked for your address and is expecting an orchestral piece from you . . . with *Bass Clarinet*!!†

. . . Of course! Then out with it, or it will be too late.

The chief point of interest as regards myself is that at least *you* should give up believing in the rumor that I had a special dislike for English concert-rooms.

No more so than for others. Into none of them do I ever go with pleasure, and people ought to see how it is easier for me being caught once in a while in the snare of a German invitation, than undertaking the long journey to England followed by a restless stay there. You really could explain matters from time to time as they really are.

I have just enough to do with concerts anyhow and fight against it on the continent as well as over there.

For your concert I wish you good luck. Ah — —, if I could come over and loaf about with you incognito! But that would be treating rather too unfriendly the many other kind invitations I have had.

Well — don't forget Richter and explain to the old and new Philharmonists what a grateful heart I have — but what a shy one!

With best greetings, yours,

* Hans Richter, the famous conductor.

†Teasing again.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XI.

(To London)

Vienna, Feb., 1880.

DEAR H.:

Your letter reaches me just as I am happening to be at home for a few days; a very rare occurrence this winter, worse luck!

Post festum my best congratulations upon the success of your concert,* which indeed must have been splendid.

The question in your letter received today is somewhat obscure, indistinct; I hardly know what to answer: "If the indications by figures of the tempi in my Requiem should be strictly adhered to?" †

Well—just as with all other music. I think here as well as with all other music the metronome is of no value. As far at least as my experience goes, everybody has, sooner or later, withdrawn his metronome marks. Those which can be found in my works—good friends have talked me into putting them there, for I myself have never believed that my blood and a mechanical instrument go well together. The so-called

* On December 2, 1879, I had conducted at St. James' Hall the first performance in England of Brahms' *Triumphlied* for double chorus and orchestra, Op. 55.

† This question I had submitted to Brahms at the request of Mr. Otto Goldschmidt, then conductor of the Bach Choir, who at that time was preparing a performance of Brahms' *German Requiem*.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

“elastic” tempo is moreover not a new invention. “Con discrezione” should be added to that as to many other things.

Is this an answer? I know no better one; but what I do know is that I indicate (without figures) my tempi, modestly, to be sure, but with the greatest care and clearness.

Remember me kindly to Mr. Goldschmidt, and tell him, please, that there is only one thing in the coming performance I dislike thinking of, and that is, that No. 5 * will not be sung by his wife. I do wish I could have heard that once from her!

In haste and with kindest greeting,

Yours,

*The beautiful soprano solo, “Ye now are sorrowful.”

†Jenny Lind.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XII.

(To Boston, U. S. A.)

Vienna, 1881.

DEAR FRIEND:

Accept my best thanks for at last giving me some news of you; it is the least you can do, though it hardly can make up for the fact that you have so basely left us.* I hope it will fit into your plans that my residence this summer will be Pressbaum, near Vienna. I am sure you will be wanting to show your wife the beautiful old "Kaiserstadt"; I shall be only a short distance away — by rail, which, however, I always travel with great pleasure!

Announce yourselves then, quick and surely!

. . . I should not like to be persuaded again to arrange Chamber-Music for the orchestra. A few times I have done it, but at once repented and put the thing aside. Were it not that nowadays everything possible is being arranged for everything possible I should be inclined to think we wrote only confusedly nowadays anyhow.

Mind, I do not mean to try and dissuade you from doing it yourself — the thing seems to be the general fashion.

I myself, however, prefer to retain my ears and know what is a pianoforte piece and what an orchestral

*I had accepted the conductorship of the newly-founded Boston Symphony Orchestra.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

piece; what a song and what an aria; what a solo-quartet and what a chorus.

But—I have still little leisure (or patience) for writing letters.

Let me soon hear you are coming. Remember me to your young wife and be heartily greeted by yours,

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XIII.

(To Nuremberg)

Pressbaum, near Vienna, 1881.

DEAR FRIEND:

I have nothing to do and am looking forward with great pleasure to your coming.

The same do a great many besides myself. Five minutes from here, in Purkersdorf: Epstein, Door with ladies, Hornbostl-Magnus (Helene); five minutes further, in Hütteldorf: Hasenbrucks, Ernst Franck; in Pötzleinsdorf: Dr. Billroth, etc., etc. In short I hope you will make yourselves comfortable with us for a while, and should you not care to remain in the town itself, there is many a cosy spot out here.

Always yours,

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XIV.

(To Boston)

Ischl, June, 1882.

DEAR FRIEND:

The sheet of paper is lying ready, but, to be on the safe side, I will send off my and Brüll's heartiest congratulations without waiting to see what else I might have to write to you.

That you have undertaken to conduct another series of twenty-five concerts is a very nice thing in itself, only not exactly to us a cause for rejoicing. The felicitations therefore mean the little daughter * only.

Heartily yours,

*Helen Henriette, born May, 1882.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XV.

(To Boston)

Vienna, 1882.

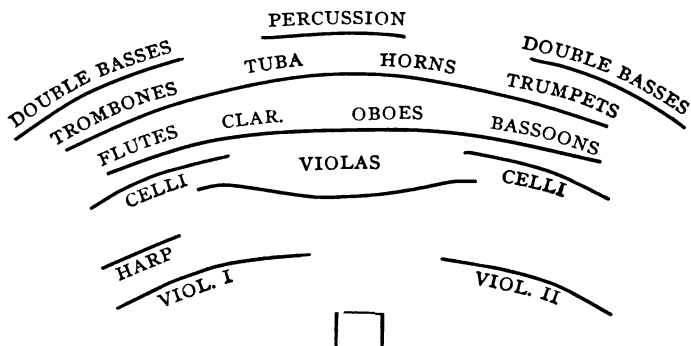
. . . Only with a hurried greeting can I answer your kind and chatty letter. I am always on the road, and under the circumstances less than ever inclined and able to write.

Just now I am coming from Budapesth and going — tomorrow — to Stuttgart, etc.

Your experiments in regard to the placing of an orchestra look very good and interesting. I should almost give preference to the first of the two drawings * on account of the horns; the violas, however, seem to give trouble up to now?

By far the best feature in both arrangements, however, is the fact that no committee will be sitting in

*In which the orchestra was arranged in this way:



RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

front of them. There is not a Kapellmeister on the whole of our continent who would not envy you that!

The "Nänie"* is being published by Peters — better are duets by Händel issued by the same firm. Have you seen them?

Enough for today. A very hearty greeting; and thanks for every greeting from you which always gives great joy to

Yours,

*Opus 82.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XVI.

(To Boston)

Vienna, 1883.

DEAR H.:

With mortification I thank you at last for so many kind and good news. You really have deserved that one should settle down comfortably to write a comfortable reply — but I beg you once for all to remember that with me the moment is still to come when I shall write the first letter *with pleasure*.

Moreover, it is most aggravating to write to one who has left us so completely and whom we could make such excellent good use of here!

I dare say it's useless to ask you if you would at all entertain the idea of taking the position at Breslau which Scholz * resigns this winter?

For your friendly pressure regarding a manuscript work for performance I must thank you. But it would be the first time I had allowed a MS. to go out of my hands. A new piece of mine I like to hear several times (in MS.). If then it appears to me—so accidentally—worthy of being printed, it cannot, for any length of time, escape that operation. Otherwise I do not give it into other hands.†

*Bernhard Scholz, composer, director of the Hoch'sche Conservatory of Music at Frankfurt-on-the-Main, then conductor of the Symphony Concerts at Breslau.

†I was however, later on, successful in procuring from Brahms the MS. of his Concerto for Violin and Violoncello (Op. 102) for first performance in England.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

But we can and shall make provision that you have such novelties over there sooner than other people. Could you make use of a choral work? In that case Simrock just now would have a rather pretty little one which you might secure!*

Now, please give my greetings to yours and — ours; I mean our colleagues. Greet them from my heart and let me have the pleasure of being allowed to keep in contact with them, though it be only by means of programmes and newspapers.

I quite see that I am not worthy of frequent news by letter! But you don't know my grateful disposition!

Again and beforehand many thanks.

Heartily yours,

*That "pretty little one" was no less important and serious a work than the "Gesang der Parzen" (Song of the Fates), Op. 89.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XVII.

(To Boston)

Vienna, 1883.

DEAR H.:

You see,* even in America you are not the first; nor will you be the last.

Now think of everything else that reaches me in that way and tell me frankly if it is possible to keep expressing one's thanks for such an abundance of kindly interest; or if one can do anything at all?

I should like very much to answer the letter; in the mean time, however, I greet you heartily.

Yours,

*Enclosed was a letter to Brahms from Theodore Thomas, then conductor of the Philharmonic Society of New York, asking him to let him have, if possible, the score of the Third Symphony in F (then still unfinished) for performance at the Cincinnati Musical Festival.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XVIII.

(To London)

Vienna, 1887.

DEAR H.:

I thank you for your kind invitation,* but am somewhat vexed at having to hear from you, too, that common rumor of my dislike of the English, etc. . . .

You really ought to know, having heard it from me often enough, that *solely* love of comfort, laziness if you like, and aversion to concerts prevent my going to England, but equally so to St. Petersburg or Paris.

That my persistent refusal could be open to misinterpretation I am well aware of. It would, however, be hopeless to explain this all, and to tell the people how it has absolutely nothing to do with music if on the one hand we here have a Bohemian Cabinet or you over there a splendid opium-war, etc., etc.

It's all vanity anyhow!

Again thanks.

Yours,

* I had offered Brahms 10,000 marks (£500) for coming over to England and conducting a series of concerts with my (the London Symphony) orchestra.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XIX.

(To London)

Thun, Switzerland, August, 1887.

Menuetto grazioso da capo e poi lo stesso con variazioni elegantissimi ed ancora dal segno e da capo col repetizione, etc. . . .

Cordiali saluti!

J. B.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XX.

(To Vienna)

Ischl, Sept., 1892.

DEAR FRIEND:

Every day I hope to start for Vienna, but cannot say for certain when it really will come to pass. I should be truly sorry if I were to miss all the beautiful things you are going to do there besides my D-major.*

But I sincerely trust you'll be induced to extend your visit for a little longer, and I may still have an opportunity of endearing myself, to the utmost of my capacity, to your ladies.

Hearty greetings.

* I conducted, among other works, Brahms' Second Symphony at one of the "Guest Concerts" arranged by the committee of the Vienna Musical and Theatrical Exhibition of '92.

RECOLLECTIONS OF BRAHMS

XXI.

(To London)

Vienna, Dec., 1892.

DEAR FRIEND:

How I am looking forward to the moment when I shall be able to write you a chatty letter in comfort; and to the moment, above all, when I shall be working on that ballad — which, however, will be an elfin-story, and for your wife, not for you.

Alas! Post Festum I had to hear the people here rave about her and her enchanting singing!

In the mean time hearty greetings from

Yours ever,

J. BR.

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