THE NINENESS IN THE ONENESS

By GEORGE MOORE

The Renaissance is never far from the thoughts of the twentieth century artist, and he often falls to thinking how it was that his illustrious ancestors of the fifteenth were able to practice, without failing, many different arts, and that it was not till the great tide of inspiration began to slacken that the painter ceased to design cathedrals. We remember, too, that in the seventeenth century our ancestors renounced the chisel and the pen, becoming almost exclusively portrait painters in the eighteenth. Blake is the only painter that comes to mind who was at once a painter and a poet. It is true that in our own little renaissance in the fifties an interest in literature sprang up among painters. Rossetti wrote some poems imbued with the beauty of his early pictures, and Whistler contributed some prose fragments to our literature in which a description of evening thrills in the memory and brings tears to the eyes when it is read aloud. But besides the nocturnes and "The Ten O'Clock" Whistler left some maxims which have borne evil fruit, and a doctrine that nobody understands painting but painters. Whistler no doubt said this, but what he meant was that nobody understands painting but a great painter which, interpreted still further, means, that nobody understood painting but Whistler; and since Whistler has gone from us the doctrine promulgated is that the painter knows or should know nothing but his palette, and our feeblest dabbler believes that he paints exclusively for dabblers which, when one considers it, is hardly a nobler ambition than to paint to please the public. It is a doctrine certainly to which Whistler would be the last man in the world to subscribe. He would have spurned such a doctrine, declaring scornfully that a man's art was for himself, and though he might allow some examples of it to be taken away and exchanged for pieces of money, I think he said once the examples returned to the artist and became his property "ultimately." But doctrine becomes sadly corrupted in the course of a few years, and what now remains of the master's

teaching is a sullen suspicion regarding a painter's talent if he confesses to literary or musical interests. To play the piano, even though he plays it very badly, awakens doubt, and when it becomes known he has an organ in his studio and plays Bach, his name is not spoken again in Chelsea. He drops out; and it has come to pass that pure music existing of and through itself is regarded with more respect than music associated with words and a dramatic action; if words there must be, the musician had better write them himself, as Wagner did; nor is the point considered that the musician may be without literary vision, for in the highest circles, it is an article of faith that whoever writes his own libretto will be inspired to write the music if there be music in him—a valuable proviso, for we have all known a musician who began a dozen different poems, abandoning them all one after the other, and his music brought to nought by the doctrine: *il faut que tout sorte de vos entrailles* repeated again and again by a sedulous friend. The suggestion that Wagner wrote his own libretti merely because he could write them better than anybody else was considered aggressive, and the remark that he wrote beautiful music to Mathilde Wesendonck's verses in even more doubtful taste. The phrase *il faut que tout sorte de nos entrailles* seemed a sufficient answer to all and sundry, and the musician was invited to lay before us the new subject on which he was minded to write.

The answer that this snippet of musical history will bring forth is that the musician must have had little music in his head for him to waste time trying to do what nature clearly intended him not to do; for a man who has something to say manages to say it pretty quickly and is not troubled with moral scruples whether he should write or beg his libretto. Every man gets the libretto he deserves from his own hand or from another's, and this being so, none needs believe himself called upon to practise two arts; and having reached agreement with all amiable spirits on this point, we find ourselves dropping into thinking that the single vision is enough on condition that we try to enrich it with memories of the other arts which we can do, the muses not being hostile to each other, but interdependent, each possessed of a distinct per-

sonality : let us not forget that the nine are but nine aspects of a single goddess, whom the Greeks might have named Æsthesia. Degas used to cry, "*Halte ! c'est mon métier*" when Huysmans passed over the frontiers of literature and descended into what seemed to Degas to be the province of the painter; and some future critic may take it upon himself to decide if the years I spent in studios and in the company of painters rather than of men of letters were a loss or a gain. Now having prepared the reader for biographical details that have not yet appeared in any one of my autobiographical works, I will relate that my interest in painting began in my sixteenth year, when my father re-entered Parliament and we left Ireland to come to live in London. It is true that I have related in a three volume book that soon after our arrival my father and I met our cousin Jim Browne in the Exhibition Road, and that Jim was a sort of Irish Gustave Doré, who improvised Julius Cæsar overturning the Druid altars and other historical subjects on large canvasses. But I have not related, at least I think I have not, that it was about the same time that I met Dick, of the "Mummer's Wife," and his brothers in Thurloe Square ; a musical family were these Maitlands, inasmuch as they played the scores of operettas by French composers. Dick was going into managership, bringing over from Paris Hervé's "Chilperic" to the Lyceum Theatre, with the author of the book and the music in the principal part ; a man thereby possessed of the third vision, for we have no account of Wagner as Siegfried ; the most we know of him in the way of interpretation is that he used to sing "Tristan" to his friends. It is true that he is answerable to some extent for the architecture of the Bayreuth Theatre, but the point need not be pressed ; enough it is for my purpose to say that the tunes of "Chilperic" caught my fancy, and those of "Le Petit Faust" pleased me, too, without leaving, however, so deep an impression on my mind as those of "Chilperic." Later, my friend Dick came into managership at the Globe Theatre, with a production of Offenbach's opera, "Les Brigands" ; and afterwards, when I went to learn painting in Paris, I met a gentleman in Julian's studio who had written an opera, and who was a member of Le Cercle des Mirlitons, a club in which the works of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven were played—a

kindly old gentleman who invited me to come with him to a concert in return for the interest I had shown in his opera, and when we came out into the Place Vendôme, after thanking him for the pleasant evening he had given me, I said: "Now I know that Hervé and Offenbach are truly Mirlitons, and that there is no music but classical music . . ."

The passion for literature fell upon me, and painting and music were forgotten till dear Edward asked me to come to hear "The Rhine Gold" at Drury Lane, and succeeded in taking me with him despite the usual protests of those days, that unmelodious music was more tedious than anything in the world. Of course it is, but—reassure yourself, dear reader, this paper is not written with a view to settling whether Wagner was a greater writer than Homer or Shakespeare, but to tell of the great wonder and delight and exaltation "The Ring" brought to me. It cannot be but interesting to hear a man tell the story of a great delight, how it came into his life suddenly, and lasted for many years, becoming, without his being aware of the change, a memory sad and sweet, the *lachrymæ rerum* of Virgil. The sight of a piano must cause Paderewski to sigh inwardly, and the word Bayreuth comes upon me now like the scent of lavender from an old chest. I should never have gone thither if Edward had not taken me to hear "The Rhine Gold," and the memory of the walk from the Temple to the theatre returns to me, and the moment when I sat with Edward waiting for the orchestra to begin, wondering if I should be bored, fearing that I should, telling Edward that if the music were not like Haydn, Beethoven or Mozart, I should try to escape from the theatre at the end of the act. "But there are no acts!" he said, and immediately after the orchestra began. The fanfare of the Rhine told me something undreamed of had come into my life, and I listened as a child listens understanding nothing, for my poor ears could not follow the intricate weaving and interweaving; my reason tottered like one in a virgin forest, for there seemed to be no path to even a partial understanding of this fulgurant orchestra, predicting at every moment wars and rumours of wars of giants against gods, I did not apprehend much more than this of the music or the story, and when the storm motive broke forth, announcing the con-

clusion of the truce, and godkind ascended the rainbow to Valhalla, there were no thoughts in me; I could only feel; I could not speak; words seemed trivial, almost futile; and the God, standing on the rainbow, listening to the lament of the maidens for the stolen gold, seemed to bring the story of art to a divine end.

But they stand no longer on a rainbow, not even at Bayreuth, for that somebody might think it too high a flight of fantasy to show gods ascending a rainbow? Yet much has been written about the necessity of scenery, lighting, costume, of something that is known as "production," and to my distress, for a rehearsal of Tristan with a tenor in a frock coat and pot hat, possessed of half the genius of Jean de Reszké, is enough for me. I dread my remembrance of Sir Beerbohm Tree's rhododendrons in "Twelfth Night," and the garish drawing rooms of the St. James's Theatre. An empty, dusky stage is enough for me if the text and the acting be excellent, and I can recall only one instance of scenery saying something that neither literary nor musical text could say, and that one justification of scenery is omitted by common consent in Bayreuth, in London, and in Paris. "Truly our state is retrograde," I said to myself on my way from King's Bench Walk to Pump Court, where dear Edward lived, and to him, "It is a cruel fate to be afflicted with a desire to understand and no means of gratifying it." "Perhaps you will understand 'Tristan' better," Edward said to console me. "But all the places are taken," I answered, and my despair was great, but at last a friend took pity, offering me a seat in his box, which I accepted with a gratitude that must have seemed odd to him. But nothing mattered, for I was going to hear another opera by Wagner. No one will ever hear "Tristan" as I heard it that evening, and when the curtain came down on Isolde's death scene, I cried out; "More wonderful than Shakespeare, Michael Angelo, Ingres or Manet," and returned to the Temple to sit overwhelmed, asking myself when I could hear "Tristan" again and if I should understand it better.

It was not till I heard "Tristan" a third time that the musical pattern began to disclose itself. I went to Bayreuth many times to hear Wagner, and to Munich to hear Wagner and Mozart, and for some years was seldom absent from the

symphony concerts, where I listened with more critical ears to my old friends, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, returning home thinking how a story might be woven from start to finish out of one set of ideas, each chapter rising out of the preceding chapter in suspended cadence always, never a full close ; and as an example of the kind of book that comes out of such ideas as these, I will name " The Brook Kerith," for the story begins like a brook ; the old woman telling stories to her grandchild may be compared to the Fanfare of the Rhine, and the brook widens out as it flows into a smooth current, not very rapid, but flowing always, turning sometimes east, sometimes west, looping and winding, disappearing at last mysteriously like a river.

In " Evelyn Innes " and " Sister Teresa," there are allusions to many different kinds of music, for the opera singer's father is an organist in a church that gathers large crowds to hear the sixteenth century contrapuntalists. She plays the viola da gamba at her father's concerts, but descriptions of madrigals and operas cannot be accepted as proof that the author's style was modified by musical interests. " Evelyn Innes " is externally musical as " Carmen " is externally Spanish ; but the writing of " The Lake " would not be as it is if I had not listened to " Lohengrin " many times ; and if any of the readers of the " Chesterian " have the opening pages of " The Lake " still in mind they will perceive the analogy. At first all is dim, but the light begins to break through the mist and in both prelude and story a voice is heard in vibrant supplication. Many more examples might be given, but one is enough, and I fall to thinking how great was my gain, and that the twentieth century artist stultifies himself when he shuts himself up in the art that he practises, and that our present poets and storytellers should spend more time in our National Galleries, not, I hasten to say, with a view of imitating d'Annunzio, the flying man, who includes descriptions of Veronese and Tintoretto in all he writes—such externalities as d'Annunzio's are worthless, for the reader feels that he is reading " padding," eloquent " padding," no doubt, but if he be an intelligent reader his meditations end on the words, " there is no such thing as good ' padding,' all ' padding,' is bad, no matter from whence it comes "; and if he

be right, and who shall say he is not, it would seem that visits to the National Gallery should be undertaken with the view of enlarging his vision of the external world. Of course, there is a danger in these visits—the poet may return as Tennyson did with a commonplace image—

"... till the hull
Looked one black dot against the verge of dawn."

We will hope, however, that he may escape the obvious and return with a finer sense of colour and with a keener insight into nature than he had before, his mind charged shall we say with the idyllic grace of a high birch overhanging a still lake or an appreciation of the melancholy, almost hostile, aspect of a rough wood in which woodmen are felling trees on either side of a ravine... Rubens, I would have the reader remember, did not play the organ himself, but an organist played whilst the master painted, and who shall say that some of the tumult of the organ does not survive in the painting?

NEWS.

M. Maurice Ravel is writing a new Ballet in collaboration with Colette Willy.

In September the orchestra of the "Augusteo" in Rome will sail for the United States, following an invitation to give a long series of concerts in the principal cities, under the direction of Mæstro Bernardino Molinari.

Mr. Eugène Goossens is engaged upon the composition of Three Piano Pieces, entitled "Nature Poems."

M. Florent Schmitt is at present working at incidental music for the performances of "Anthony and Cleopatra" to be given shortly in Paris by Madame Ida Rubinstein.

"In America we blame the foreign conductors, who have no sympathy with native effort, but here (in England) they have only native conductors: Wood, Geoffrey Toye, Landon Ronald, *Beethoven*, Goossens, and yet———. It is certainly true that English music is as rarely heard in England as American music is—or was—in America."—*Musical Courier*, New York, June 26th, 1919. We would draw our contemporary's attention to the Promenade Concert programmes on a Friday night, which show that one of our English conductors at any rate is not opposed to introducing the works of his eminent colleague to the British public.

M. Camille Erlanger has left a number of unfinished works, among others the Opera "Faublas," the orchestration of which has been entrusted to M. Gabriel Grovlez. The work is to be produced at the Paris Opera.