

A SECOND edition of *Richard Wagner in the Mirror of Criticism* has just been published in Leipsic. It announces itself to be "A Dictionary of Impoliteness, containing rude, sneering, spiteful and libelous expressions used against Richard Wagner, his works and his friends, by their enemies and other unbelievers." The collector of the various and fairly innumerable items of "impoliteness" contained in this unique book—one William Tappert—has placed those who have eyes to see and ears to hear, under distinct obligations. From it one may easily estimate just about what contemporary criticism is usually worth regarding the work, on any line, of those who are ahead of the age in which they live. Here are a few of these "items," to use the mildest possible term:

Charlatan, scandal-monger, *claquer*, fanatic of realism, addlepat, a literary lackey, hireling, fool, a modern Nero, a churner of phrases, barbarian, pigmy, the Marat of music, and others, some of which are too abominable to be mentioned in these columns. So much for Wagner himself.

The following words are descriptive(?) of Wagner's music:

Hocus-pocus, dog-music, Jesuit music, humbug, teapot music, caricature, Katzenjammer music, plague wishwash music, bestialism, indecency, musical weeds, irresponsible, straw sentiment, blasphemy, mollusc music, a musical sand-heap, and so on for page after page.

One scarcely wonders that Tappert speaks of Wagner as living in a "miasma of rudeness." So eminent a critic as Prof. Max Müller wrote of this creator of the marvelous Dramas of the Soul:

Wagner proved that he is no poet by his maltreatment of the Nibelungen and Parsifal Cycles. For this he deserves what happened to Homer in the nether world, according to Diogenes Laertius, viii, 21.

This, however, is reasonably compassionate, seeing that the soul of Homer met no more unpleasant a fate than being merely hung to a tree surrounded by writhing snakes!

Even Hiller, a musician and Mendelssohn's friend, characterized the *Meistersinger* as "the craziest attack ever yet made on art, culture, music and poetry." Kalbeck called Wagner "a musical Heliogabalus," and Franz Hille naively inquired: "Is Wagner not a demon who poisons all budding artistic life?" And one German musical critic remarked, *apropos* the memorial medal struck in Bayreuth after the first festival performance:

The malicious say that this medal, worn after the fashion of a cholera charm, will render one immune

from all attacks of modesty, common sense and regard for classical music—maladies which have recently appeared among Wagnerians in rare and isolated cases!

Now what claim can such criticism set up for respect? It is a pity that the rack and the thumbscrew and the hot iron are so old-fashioned. They aren't more than half as torturesome as the pen of libel and the tongue of slander have often been, and I'll venture that, up to the present moment, the former are not responsible for half as many wrecked lives. H.