

## RECOLLECTIONS AND ANECDOTES OF BÜLOW.



WHEN Hans von Bülow, in 1851, at the age of twenty-one, resolved to devote his life entirely to music, he found a large field for desirable reform in which to exercise his activity. Liszt, who, previous to 1847, had reaped the laurels of a royal virtuoso, then began his career as conductor at the Royal Opera House in Weimar, and soon found himself surrounded by the best of the young musical talent of the world. His pupils—the artists of our generation—he easily indoctrinated with the novel ideas which he brought forward in his own compositions. He began the publication of his symphonic poems, and in 1850 brought out Wagner's «Lohengrin» in Weimar for the first time. This production, under the baton of Liszt, opened the «thirty years' war» between the classical and the new German schools. The offensive struggle was made under great difficulties, the headquarters of Liszt, the general-in-chief, being in Weimar. The contention was between form and freedom; the «classicists» confined their creative acts to well-defined art forms, while the «romanticists» desired to bring out new ideas, to enrich the tone material of their art, and to add to it new means of expressing emotion. The romantic school, however, had within itself the germ of artistic realism. Thus Schubert, whose spirit is essentially romantic, is accounted classic because he merely sought to express the sentiment of the poems he turned into songs, without any effort to make each note conform to the exact shade of feeling expressed by the word to which it was sung. Thus conformity of note to word, the crucial test of the new German school, was instituted by Liszt, whose songs are practically small phrases in recitative form. Liszt further declared war by breaking the laws of formal symmetry in his symphonic poems. In proposing that the only limits to musical form should be the limits which define the poetical idea expressed by the music, he became, with Berlioz, the champion of program music. To obtain new means to express the different emotions, he used new and unusual harmonic combinations. Berlioz, who had visited Ger-

many between 1842 and 1845, enlarged the orchestra with new instruments and new tone-coloring. Wagner employed all these innovations in his music-dramas, and became the exponent *de facto* of the new German school.

Wagner's versatility as a writer soon brought matters to a crisis, and at the same time secured him a host of adherents. Among the Liszt-Wagner forces were many men now well known for originality and talent. Among them we recall Friedrich Nietzsche, professor of classical philology in Basel. Upon the publication of «Parsifal,» however, Nietzsche publicly announced his defection from the cause in a pamphlet called the «Fall of Wagner.» On the other hand, Heinrich Ehrlich (better known in America as the editor of «Tausig's Studies») contributed a tract on «Wagner's Art and True Christianity.» Richard Pohl, L. Köhler, Franz Müller, Joachim Raff, William Tappert, Heinrich Porges, Otto Lessmann (Bülow's pupil), and Gottlieb Federlein all wrote, analyzed, and explained in tracts, in the columns of the «Allgemeine Deutsche Zeitung,» or in other musical periodicals wherever open to their views. Franz Brendel, who succeeded Schumann in the «Neue Zeitschrift für Musik,» made that paper a kind of official organ for the propagation of the ideas of the young dramatic-musical school, and it was in its pages that Wagner's famous anonymous article, «Das Judenthum in der Musik,» first appeared. The activities of the new propaganda did not stop here. Felix Draeseke wrote a humorous school of harmony in rhyme, while Weitzman actually formulated the laws of the new harmonic development, and reduced the whole to a practical pedagogic basis. Karl Klindworth wrote the piano scores of the Nibelungen Trilogy; Peter Cornelius, poet and musical littérateur, translated many of Liszt's French writings into German; Tausig, whom Weitzman dubbed «the last of the virtuosi,» conducted the works of Wagner, Liszt, and Berlioz in Vienna. The entire movement was full of energy, productivity, and violent rancor. Religion, race, morals, politics, and artistic convictions were inextricably involved in the

mêlée. Such an array of musical genius as the world will hardly see again, intoxicated with the beauty, the liberty, the originality, and the power of the new creative movement, threw itself into it with all the ardor of the artistic nature.

No wonder that a man like Bülow, a thinker, a student educated in the universities of Berlin and Leipsic, did not stand aloof, but took up the cry, «The public needs education, and must have it. I will be your teacher; follow me.» Like Napoleon, he decided to be dictator in the new empire. He wrote, he edited, he gave concerts and recitals, he revised, he founded concert organizations, he published, he brought forward writers and musicians. He invigorated, disciplined, inspired, and, in short, constituted a head center of aggression in the prosecution of the movement to which he adhered. The declaration of war against Wagner in Paris in 1859, Wagner's part in the political conspiracy in Saxony, and his consequent exile, the glorious victories of his operas in the Bavarian capital, and the present recognition of his greatness in Paris, are significant epochs in the struggle. In all this Bülow's success is identified with Wagner's; but in estimating Bülow's life-work, he is seen to be greatest not in his own musical performances, but in what he impressed upon that performance. In him Emerson's saying, «Somewhat resides in the men whose fame has come down to us that begot an expectation that outran all their performance,» is most strongly exemplified. Neither Bülow's piano-playing nor his conducting accounts for the enormous influence that he exercised upon the musical life of his generation. His influence on music was the work less of his musical endowment than of his personality; «that reserved force which acts directly by presence, and without means,» was emphatically his. And behind that force lay his simplicity of aim and his sincerity of conviction. He was first and foremost a teacher. To teach he traveled as concert pianist, and gave recitals in all the principal cities of Europe. His programs were carefully planned to propagate his ideas. To a collector these programs would be treasures of art; every worthy master, known or unknown to the musical world, was represented. What the painter gains from the exhibit of academy and salon, the composer obtains from the concert program of the popular artist. The popularity which more than one modern composer now enjoys is directly traceable to Bülow's introduction of his works. This presentation to the public of new music Bülow persistently

made, for music's sake. He shared with Liszt the habit and principle of working continuously for what he recognized as good.

As pianist, conductor, and writer, Bülow taught and trained his public; but among his many personal pupils, although his lessons were careful, minute, and painstaking in the extreme, not one has achieved undoubted preëminence; while Liszt, who inspired, attracted, encouraged, and never taught, really formed the pianists of the world. Creative genius is a fire that kindles and sustains kindred genius, and such genius Bülow had not; yet his relations with his pupils are a pleasant theme, in sharp contrast to his haughtiness among people of high social rank, and to his short memory of favors received from such noble sources. I like to remember how, in the midst of a brilliant concert in a famous capital, he recalled the name of an old bassoon player in the orchestra, the father of a former pupil; how he hunted the old man up, and sat by him the whole evening in the intervals of the performance, saying kindly things about the son.

But, although Bülow formed no one pre-eminent pianist, he succeeded in impressing his standard of musicianship upon the whole musical life of Germany, and that standard was exacting. One of his pupils once requested of him an opportunity to play in concert. Bülow looked non-committal, and made no reply. Six months later the applicant, who had meanwhile given up hope of appearing in public, and had been teaching diligently in a conservatory, received a note announcing that, through Bülow's recommendation, he was invited to play exactly five days later in one of the oldest German university towns. Appalled at the prospect, the young man hurried to his patron to explain. «Not ready!» exclaimed Bülow, looking through him as if he did not exist, and then, turning scornfully on his heel, «An artist is always ready.» Stung by his contempt, the youth undertook the concert, slept not during three nights and days of preparation, was successful, and, hastening to return thanks, found that Bülow had already possessed himself of full information, and was humming and playing snatches of the program in high good humor.

Another pupil, on whom he sprang a similar surprise, did not fare so well. Bülow had promised to bring out a concerto (Op. 30) which Friedrich Kiel, his enthusiastic admirer, had dedicated to him. The annual meeting of the Ton-Künstler Verein, to be held at Carlsruhe, furnished the opportunity. Although Kiel belonged to a most conserva-

tive classical school, and Bülow was immersed heart and soul in the «music of the future,» the latter threw himself into the study of his friend's composition with such ardor that when, after the manuscript had been in his possession five days, Kiel called, by invitation, to look over the *tempi* and *nuancen*, Bülow played the whole from memory, and turned over the manuscript to the composer so that he could accompany him on the second piano. The domestic sorrow which resulted in the breaking up of his home immediately followed. Beside himself from the shock, Bülow was confined to his room by his physician's orders; but in his agony he did not forget Kiel, though playing was now impossible for him. As soon as he could command himself, he wrote to one of his most efficient pupils, offered the young man a check for one hundred thalers for his traveling expenses, and begged him to undertake the concerto. There were now only four days before the concert; the pupil could not prepare Kiel's work in time, and it was omitted from the program. Bülow never forgave the unfortunate pianist, and would have nothing more to do with him.

I have before me a letter of Bülow's, written to a pupil who had disappointed him, which gives a curious insight into his work as a teacher. After complaining that out of every eighteen lessons he loses six, that he cannot compose on lesson days, he adds: «It is not preference for teaching that makes me rob myself of my time; I have talents which suffer greatly from my choice of this profession, and time is very short, especially for an artist who wishes to accomplish anything out of the ordinary. I cannot persuade myself to resign this ambition, though I am obliged to curtail it greatly by using my time for other matters. I have therefore divided my hours in such a way that some days are taken up entirely in giving lessons, others exclusively in private work. Except when small concert tours have interfered, I have always considered myself bound to keep my appointments with my pupils. You, whose capital is the use you make of your time, will understand the justice of my resolution. I am not going to be absurd, and blame you for the lessons you have missed, but I must make other arrangements in future.» Here we have the man—scrupulous, industrious, ambitious, and kindly, but devoid of the careless spontaneity of the creative musician. Mendelssohn could beguile a sleepless night by writing a hunting-song; Schubert scrawled his immortal serenade on a wine-house table; Mozart paid a butcher's

bill with a waltz; but Bülow could not collect his thoughts to compose on lesson days.

Bülow had no mercy on himself; he would rob himself of sleep for weeks to do a bit of writing or editing. The story of the tumbler of cold water that Buffon ordered his valet to throw in his face to spoil his morning nap is literally true of Bülow. Under such hydropathic inspiration he actually finished his «Fantasie» (Op. 17) on the «Ballo in Maschera.»

It is usual to say that Bülow could not compose; but this is true only so far that his talent for composition was of less importance than his personality. His «Sänger's Fluch» is musical, interesting, and beautiful, but devoid of emotion. The same is true of his «Nirvana.» Musicians enjoy Bülow's compositions in exact proportion to their musical learning. The same must be said of his piano playing. His interpretation was always interesting and polished, accurate even to the smallest details; but there was no spontaneity in it. Schumann he disliked because he could not command the necessary technic to play him, and he could play neither Chopin nor Liszt, because he lacked the fancy required for the one and the abandon necessary to interpret the other. The difference between Liszt's «Don Juan» fantasia, under the fingers of Tausig, or even of D'Albert, and under those of Bülow, discovers the fatal defect in the latter. At the piano Bülow was never free. His fame as a pianist must rest on his playing of Beethoven, especially Op. 106 and Op. 111. Here his resources are exclusively intellectual—discrimination, contrast, construction, and climax. Bülow's mental organization was inflexible. He has been described as a cross between a Bismarck and a Schopenhauer. He was rigid in mind and body. The feline suppleness of muscle characteristic of the born pianist was not his. His technic was obtained and kept up at great physical expense. His well-known saying that if he lost one day's practice he felt it himself, but if he lost three the public knew it, is a confession of the burden he carried. Contrast the career of Paganini, who, during the great concert tour in which he carried the world by storm, never practised a note. He had his skill by nature. Bülow, on the contrary, acquired his virtuosity painfully and late, and in consequence lost it early. To the bodily fatigue and nervous wear occasioned by incessant piano practice must be attributed a great part of his irritability, and ultimately his untimely death. He always said that he began to study two years too late, *i. e.*, at eight years of age instead of six. As he had sufficient execution at fourteen to play Men-

delssohn's concerto in G minor before Frederick Wieck, the father and teacher of Clara Schumann, the statement marks the difference between amateur and professional requirements.

The lack of spontaneity in Bülow's piano playing was in astonishing contrast to the fire, dash, and freedom of his conducting. The orchestra was, in fact, his natural instrument, and this explains his passionate devotion to the new school of composition, which had the development of orchestral music as its vital factor. His mental equipment for a conductor was complete. The ear and memory of musical genius were Bülow's in a most astonishing degree. His phenomenal memory had, in fact, no boundary line.

I have referred to Bülow's astonishing feat of memorizing Kiel's concerto, which the man who wrote it could not accompany without notes. His accuracy was almost infallible. He was once rehearsing a composition of Liszt's for orchestra, in that composer's presence, without notes. Liszt interrupted to say that a certain note should have been played *piano*. «No,» replied Bülow; «it is *sforzando*.» «Look and see,» persisted the composer. The score was produced. Bülow was right. How everybody did applaud! In the excitement, one of the brass-wind players lost his place. «Look for a b-flat in your part,» said Bülow, still without his notes. «Five measures farther on I wish to begin.»

I once called on Bülow, by appointment, at a certain hour. As I waited outside the door, watch in hand, for the precise moment agreed on (it was one of his peculiarities to resent violently any deviation from his hours; to be a moment too early was just as heinous an offense as to be a moment too late), I heard him reading Bach's «Chromatic Fantasie» at the piano, so slowly conning each note that I knew he was committing it to memory. «There,» said he, when I entered, «it's done. I am going to play it in a concert to-night, and I've learned it by heart since dinner. I do not like to be so hurried, but I had no time, and I am determined to make them hear Bach whether they like it or not. Do you know how to be perfectly sure of your piece in public? Play it over with each hand separately three times the day before the concert, and do not play it at all the day you perform. Then you are certain not to forget the notes.»

Long before middle life he knew by heart even the smallest details of the classical works of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn, Scarlatti, Bach, Handel, and those of the modern school, such as Chopin, Schumann, Brahms, Jensen,

Raff, Liszt, and Wagner. Not only were their piano compositions on his finger-tips, but still more surprising were his feats of musical memory as an orchestra and opera conductor. The Hanover, Meininger, and, above all, the Munich Opera-house, furnish a list of the most incredible achievements of his skill as a leader of the operatic stage. Will there ever again be an orchestra trained to play the Beethoven symphonies without notes, as the Meininger Orchestra played them under Bülow's baton?

Here, too, the instinct of the teacher shone preëminent. He founded the Symphonic Concerts in Berlin to offset the Philharmonic Concerts of Taubert. This successfully accomplished, he wrote to a friend: «As I do not like to see my work go to pieces, I am happy that Hans von Bronsart will be my successor in Berlin. I go with pleasure to Munich, where I am sure to find a more congenial atmosphere.» The «atmosphere» was operatic. All Wagner's operas, regardless of cost, were put on the stage by order of King Louis, under the direct inspiration of the composer, and the leadership of Bülow.

Bülow's fame as an interpretive musician may safely rest upon his conducting of the works of Wagner and Beethoven. The incomparable production of «Tristan und Isolde» in Munich in 1865, of the «Meistersinger» in 1868, his training, in 1880, of the hitherto unknown Meininger Orchestra, with which he «concerted» all over Germany and Holland, and finally, the Philharmonic Concerts in Berlin and Hamburg, are immortal in the annals of the conductor's baton.

Bülow's own shortcomings as composer and pianist did not make him blind to the abilities of others; but he demanded artistic sincerity. Pot-boilers were his abhorrence. «I do not see how Jaell can play the same piece an hour every morning, year after year,» he exclaimed indignantly, as he kicked the music under the piano after reading (by request) one of this popular artist's paraphrases. He was just as ready to extol as to condemn. One day a foreigner, young and unknown, entered Bülow's music-room as he sat talking over business matters with Wagner. The stranger presented a letter of introduction, to which the artist paid little attention, and sat down patiently to wait. Wagner continued to talk, and to escape hearing a conversation not meant for his ear, the visitor approached the piano. The score of «Rheingold» stood open on the rack. Before he realized it he became absorbed in the music, began to play it at first *sotto voce*, and soon, abandoned to its

charm, with a most superb mastery. Wagner, on the point of taking leave, turned back and stood motionless to listen; the splendid genius of the player became more and more evident; and, unable to restrain themselves, Bülow and Wagner rushed to embrace the unknown musician. It was Camille Saint-Saëns.

Bülow had barely received his appointment as court pianist to Ludwig I of Bavaria when the blow fell which ruined his life. Before him stood two alternatives: should he sacrifice his artistic or his human feelings? To adhere to Wagner, who had broken up his home, and to the movement to which he was enthusiastically pledged, meant to stamp out every emotion of resentment that is keenest in man. Bülow, with incredible self-abnegation, resolved that the progress of music, to which he had devoted his life, should not suffer in his quarrel. He continued to support the career of the rising genius, and never flinched from his resolution to force Wagner's success onward until that success was absolute. None the less the inner struggle destroyed him. His health never recovered. His fickleness to friends and benefactors became proverbial. His irritability developed almost into mania. The natural sweetness and loyalty of his nature were turned to bitterness. The cruelty of his epigram set his path with enemies. But his work for music went forward unceasingly, and it is impossible to overestimate what his self-sacrifice has done for it.

In the early days of the Wagner struggle Bülow threw the whole weight of his personality into the scale. Musicians and press eyed the Wagnerian innovations askance, and even Bülow's own orchestra, which found its technique inadequate to the new demands, privately declared the Wagnerian effects to be humbug. Bülow nursed his wrath as if it had been a personal affront, and one day at a rehearsal of the «*Meistersinger*» he stopped the orchestra just before a peculiarly treacherous passage, laid down his baton, and said sarcastically to the delinquent horn-blowers, «*Look out, gentlemen; there 's (humbug) ahead.*»

Bülow's part in accomplishing Wagner's triumph has prevented recognition of the breadth of his own views, and of his ultimate freedom from party bias. Brahms is as conservative as Wagner is revolutionary, yet it was Bülow who brought Brahms to the front, and trumpeted his fame in notes of the most lavish praise and admiration. He was just as untiring in his efforts to forward the fortunes of Raff, whose dangerous gift of melody fairly

betrayed him into many a *salon-stuck*. Bülow even played Raff's concerto, which is brimful of light melody. When Jensen could not obtain a hearing, Bülow put his music on his recital programs, wrote an exquisite critique on his genius, and thereby produced for his favorite a host of admirers. He was always in the opposition. When one battle had been successfully fought, he turned to find a new fray. When the tide of popular fancy turned against Mendelssohn, Bülow hastened to play and edit his compositions. His editions of the «*Capriccio*» (Op. 5), and of the «*Rondo*» (Op. 14), are the most exquisite extant. He always found time to write a friendly preface to a meritorious work, and no paragraph ever emanated from his pen that was not thoughtful and suggestive. He concerned himself about the little canons of Kunz, the forgotten beauties of Scarlatti and Gluck, and the noble literature of Beethoven. His name was the «*open sesame*» to popular approval, and it was never refused to anything which he believed to be of value to music.

Bülow loved culture passionately. There is an authentic story of his making a day's journey to Stockholm with a well-known savant, and discussing with him every current topic of politics, literature, science, and art, except music. In the evening the traveler was astonished to find his delightful companion on the platform giving a piano recital.

When he made a concert tour, he provided himself with the history of the countries he traversed. He went through Italy one entire season with a history of Rome under his arm. Undoubtedly the author who had the greatest influence on him was Schopenhauer. To the day of his death he could repeat pages of his books by heart; when he was in the university he used to sleep with his favorite volume under his pillow. Once a fellow-student came in, and playfully threw the book across the room, to Bülow's intense anger. Schopenhauer is a poor consolation to a man of sorrows, and his influence was no help to Bülow's inner life and feeling. Under his tuition his scholar became a confirmed pessimist. His emotional pessimism, his refractory nervous organization, his quick and vivid musical intelligence, and his wide and varied culture, all worked together in everything he did, and no estimate of his influence upon the music of to-day is just which does not find each of these elements vital in it.

The pathetic part of music is its loneliness. Bülow could recognize the genius of Saint-Saëns because he was great himself. But he learned early that from his public he could

expect no similar recognition. He had not the genial art of emotional, musical speech which is nature's universal language. He grew to hate the laity, which would rather feel than reason about what it listens to. As he became older, more cold, more intellectual, and more unhappy, his temper toward his hearers grew worse and worse. «If you will alter the stage as I propose,» he said to Wagner, in my hearing, «we shall lose only a couple of rows of hogs from the auditorium.»

Social rank did not count in his estimate of values. He broke up an audience of titled personages assembled to enjoy one of his rehearsals, by causing the bassoon players to perform their parts alone until the listeners all left in disgust. «Now,» said he, cheerfully, when the last of his noble hearers had departed, «we'll go to work.» He kicked the name-board of a certain piano off the stage because it degraded the artist into an advertisement. In the presence of an enthusiastic audience he once noticed two laurel wreaths on the piano. He picked them up, looked at them, and then kicked them under the instrument. He did this because he resented the idea that musicians should be treated differently from other men. He wished music to be a manly calling. He would not have it degraded into a matter of patronage. «Go, take that laurel wreath to Herr Franz Lachner [his predecessor in Munich], who is on the pension list,» he exclaimed to an usher. «I am not superannuated.»

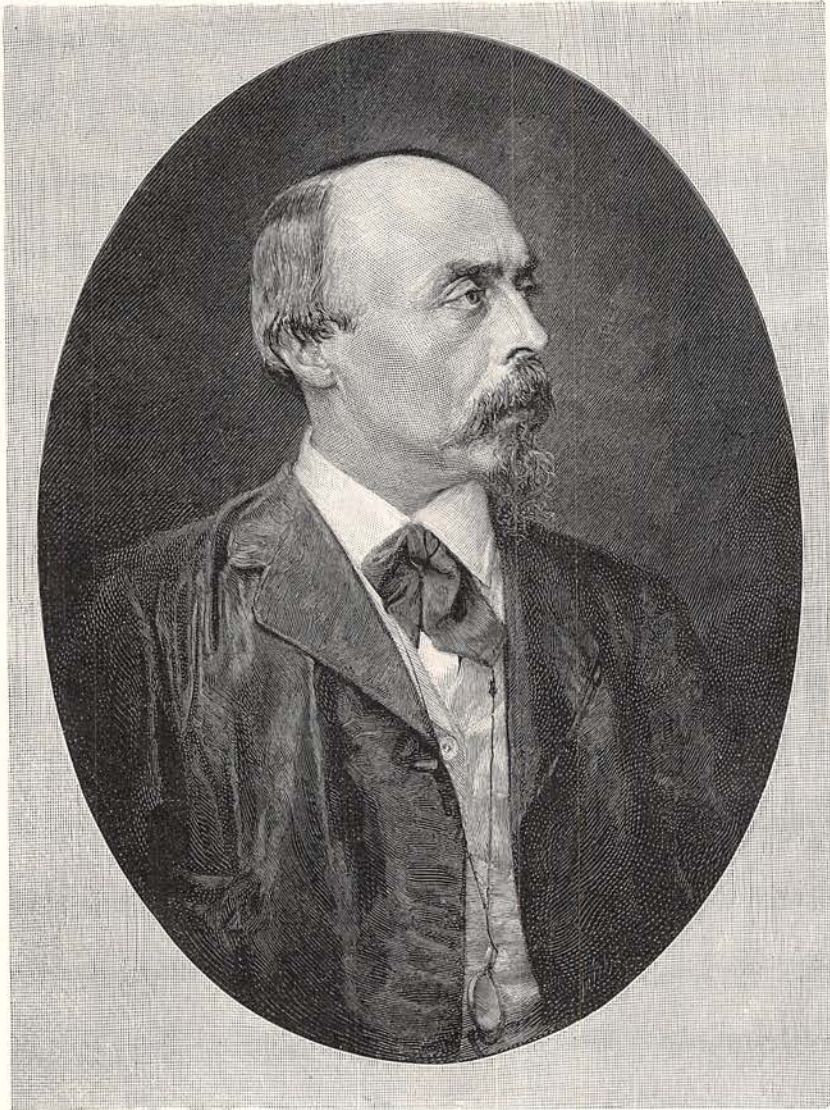
Like Liszt, Bülow realized with shame that music was an art the exponents of which were the pets and playthings of noble patrons. Like Liszt, he asserted the right to live on equal terms with people of culture—as a private gentleman. To build music up into the rank and standing of an independent profession was the dream and struggle of Bülow's life. Every musician who values his own manhood owes to him an opportunity of self-respect heretofore unheard of.

His naïveté was equal to his insolence. The *haute société* of Berlin was gathered to examine a phonograph. There were cylinders of sentiments from the Emperor and various

noble personages, and Bülow was asked to play into the instrument. When he came to hear his own performance repeated through the tube, his amazement and horror were boundless. «That machine is n't worth anything,» he exclaimed. «It is n't true; I never played like that, never!»

I have said that there was a lack of feline character in Bülow's physique. He was, however, very feline in his nature. When he saw a friend whom he liked in the street, he would run toward him, embrace him, and kiss him on both cheeks. Within ten minutes his manner would change, and he would say some thing so bitter, so personal, so wounding, that the victim would never forget its sting. Months or years after the same man would perhaps receive, unexpected and unasked, some practical advancement in his fortune that could be traced directly to Bülow's helpful hand. Bülow's love of helpfulness and his passion for sarcasm were continually at war. He not only worked with voice and pen for musicians whose talent constituted their only claim on him, and whom he insulted between whiles, but the proceeds of his concerts were freely spent on artistic interests. One whole tour was made to increase the capital to bring out Wagner's operas. Musicians' widows, music societies, monuments, and publishing schemes all profited by his generosity. And yet at the end of a century of bitterness, hatred, and rancor, unparalleled in the history of art, this «gospel of music,» as its cult fondly called the doctrines which they advocated, is, after all, not a final and conclusive revelation of the laws of beauty. It is but one wave of musical development. In the great ocean of music nothing is lost. The Wagner cult, which has beaten with such fury upon the shore of art, which proclaimed it to be its mission to efface everything old and time-worn, has effaced nothing, and a new generation will witness a new development peculiar to itself; but into the broad current of the world's musical life the passionate, forceful nature of Bülow has passed, and there it will be more and more felt for good.

Bernard Boekelman.



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*Hans v. Bülow*

HANS VON BÜLOW.