

not bear to see it broken. Finally, however, on 10 May, he gave in to pressure from his ministers and issued the order. He then retired to Berg castle to hide his head in the sand. Officials who tried to confer with him found, to their exasperation, that he would disappear for hours on end, sometimes to the Roseninsel, a little island in Lake Starnberg where he had a villa. Pfistermeister had a meeting with him on 15 May and afterwards wrote to Privy Councillor Gietl that the King was 'so overwrought that he looked quite miserable'.³ Moreover he had spoken of abdication on the grounds of mental ill health, and of going to live in Switzerland.

The reason why Ludwig's thoughts were turning to Switzerland lay not only in his love for the country but also in the fact that Wagner had made his home there. After his departure from Munich he and Cosima had settled down in Tribschen, a charming villa on the shore of Lake Lucerne, paying the first year's rent with a gift from Ludwig. Here, supported by the King's continuing allowance, he was to spend the happiest and most tranquil six years of his life, completing *Die Meistersinger* and *Siegfried*, composing *Götterdämmerung* and the *Siegfried Idyll*, and writing some of the most important of his prose works.

Ludwig, in despair at the madness which seemed to prevail all around him, was yearning for the consolation of his friend's company. Abdication in favour of Otto seemed to offer a solution, and on 15 May he sent a telegram to Wagner asking for his advice: 'Increasingly the horizon darkens, the bright sun of peace is in terrible torment. I implore the Friend to send me a speedy answer to the following question: if it is the wish of the Dear One I will gladly renounce the throne and its barren splendour, come to him and never part from him.'⁴ Wagner's letter in reply shows that he was capable of giving wise advice:

... Renounce, I beseech you, during this half year all concern with art and with our plans . . . Turn your attention with the greatest energy to matters of state; give up your comforting solitude in Berg; remain in your Residenz: stay with your people, show yourself to them. If you love me, as I earnestly hope, then hear my plea when I ask you to open Parliament in person on 22 May.⁵

Wagner went on to say that if by the autumn Ludwig still found himself in an intolerable position, then abdication might be the answer.

Ludwig was partly brought to his senses by the letter. Nevertheless he was so eager to see his friend that he ignored the pleas of Wagner and of his ministers to open Parliament and instead set off clandestinely to see Wagner. Having already sent Paul Taxis on ahead, he himself departed on the very day when the crucial opening of Parliament had been due to take place, which also happened to be Wagner's birthday. Early in the morning, in order to allay suspicion, he telegraphed his good wishes to the Friend.

Then, after a conference with Lutz, he set out ostensibly for his usual morning ride, accompanied only by a single groom. He made for the station at Bissenhofen and from there caught a train to Lindau on Lake Constance. A steamer took him across to Rorschach, and by the afternoon he was standing at the garden gate of Tribschen dressed in a black coat and broad-brimmed hat like some wandering poet. He announced himself to the servant as 'Walter Stolzinger', a character from *Die Meistersinger*. A few moments later Wagner, having understood the message, came down the steps to greet his visitor warmly.

Ludwig stayed for two days at Tribschen, sleeping in Wagner's small study. It was during this visit that he met Cosima for the first time. The details of what he and Wagner talked about are not recorded, but Ludwig left much restored in morale and with a promise that he would abide by the decision of the majority Parliament as to the war.

On his return he finally presided over the opening of Parliament, but by then the news of his visit to Switzerland had leaked out, causing wide indignation. He was given a frosty reception by the crowd on the way to the ceremony, and a few words of abuse were heard as his carriage passed. The press took the opportunity to reopen its attacks on Wagner, and the *Volksbote* published an article hinting in an obvious manner at the true relationship between Wagner and Cosima. This was too much for Bülow. Although he had obviously known for a long time about his wife's infidelity, he did not like to be made a fool of in public and he wrote to the editor of the newspaper demanding either an apology or a duel. He then hurried off to Switzerland to discuss the situation with Cosima and Wagner. At this stage Wagner was in a vulnerable position, and any public revelations about his relationship with Cosima could have been used by his enemies. Bülow and Cosima were equally anxious to keep the truth concealed. As a result of their deliberations a letter was drawn up by Wagner stating that there was no truth in the allegation that Cosima was his mistress. The letter was then sent to Ludwig with a request that he sign it, and it was backed up by an appeal from Cosima stating her anxious wish to keep her husband's name untarnished for the sake of her three children – one of whom was, of course, Wagner's. Ludwig, in his innocence and loyalty to Wagner, signed the letter, which Bülow then published. Later, when the King found out about the deception, he was deeply hurt. The episode is one of the darkest stains on Wagner's reputation.

But such personal problems were being increasingly overshadowed by the general turmoil into which Germany was falling. On 16 June the German Confederation, which included Bavaria, declared war on Prussia. And still Ludwig refused to face the situation. On the same day that war was declared, Hohenlohe wrote in his diary:

me, was infinitely sad when she learned that I did not feel the same way. Moved by her unhappy state and feeling genuine sympathy for her, I allowed myself to be lured into the ill-considered step of becoming engaged.⁴

Whatever reason or combination of reasons was responsible, things came to a head in a scene that might have been part of a romantic operetta. On 21 January he and Sophie were both at a splendid ball in Munich and danced together far into the night to the music of Johann Strauss, then at the height of his career. Ludwig was carried away, and in the early hours of the morning he announced to his mother that he wished to marry Sophie. The Queen Mother immediately went off to confer with the Duchess, and by 9 o'clock the next morning Sophie had accepted and everything was arranged. On the evening of the same day Ludwig and his mother attended a play at the Court Theatre. Sophie and her parents were also there, and during the interval Ludwig fetched Sophie from her box and led her to his own where she took her seat between him and the Queen Mother. The audience could be in no doubt as to the meaning of this happening. On the same day Ludwig sent a telegram to Wagner telling him the news: 'The faithful Sachs informs Walther joyfully that he has found his Eva, that Siegfried has found his Brünhilde.'⁵ Wagner and Cosima were delighted, as was ex-King Ludwig I, who composed a sonnet for the occasion, comparing the engaged couple to Venus and Adonis.

Soon the whole country was talking about the engagement and glasses were being raised to the King's future wife. There were, it is true, a few dissenting voices. Some felt that a match with a foreign princess would have been more advantageous politically, and the Protestant faction were disappointed that Ludwig had chosen a Catholic bride. But most people were pleased and relieved that their King had taken the first step towards securing the succession. The souvenir shops began to do a brisk trade in engravings and medallions of the couple.

But from the start there were hints that all was not as it should be. In the photographs of the pair standing arm in arm, Ludwig looks distant and awkward. Clearly his heart was not in the engagement. The impatience with which he had hurried it through was the reckless impatience of a man who knows he is plunging into something ill-conceived but rushes in a kind of ecstatic foreknowledge of the doom he is bringing upon himself. As soon as he came to his senses and realized the full implications of the course he had embarked upon he began to draw back.

For a time, however, he tried, in his own eccentric manner, to play the part of the ardent fiancé. He sent Sophie numerous letters in which he addressed her as 'Elsa', presumably thinking of Elsa von Brabant in *Lohengrin*, and signed himself 'Heinrich', possibly a reminder of their childhood drama in which he played Heinrich Faust or perhaps a reference

counterbalance to that barren, inartistic mode of living as it manifests itself so abhorrently in Paris. In Germany we must raise the banner of pure and holy art so that it flies from the battlements, summoning German youth to rally around it.'⁵

For a few months the correspondence between King and composer continued harmoniously, but by the end of 1867 another serious breach had opened up. The reason for this lay partly in a series of articles which Wagner wrote for the *Süddeutsche Presse*, a new journal, supported initially by government funds, which had replaced the official organ, the *Bayerische Zeitung*, at the beginning of October and had as its editor Wagner's friend Julius Fröbel. In these articles Wagner held forth on the theme of the essential superiority of the German nation and the need for a rebirth of the German spirit. Such a rebirth, he wrote, would 'found a new and truly German civilization, extending its benefits even beyond our frontiers'. This, he argued, had been 'the universal mission of the German folk since its entry into history'.⁶ He called for an end to the estrangement between the rulers and their people, praising the two preceding Kings of Bavaria and hinting that the present one would set an example to the other German monarchs. He also declared that the theatre was 'the spiritual seed and kernel of all national-poetic and national-ethical culture' and that no genuine folk culture was possible until the lofty role of the theatre had been fully recognized.⁷

At first the King was enthusiastic about the articles, but after eight of them had appeared he began to be disturbed by the direction they were taking. Wagner had once again been unable to resist the temptation to pontificate about political matters and had wandered off his original theme into delivering criticisms of Church and State and lecturing his readers on the functions of the monarchy. Ludwig decided that Wagner had gone too far, and after thirteen articles had appeared a government official called at the office of the *Süddeutsche Presse* with an order from the King that publication of the articles be suspended.

It is possible, however, that Ludwig would not have taken this action had he not already been displeased with Wagner because of the fact that the composer's relationship with Cosima was becoming increasingly apparent. This was due largely to Malvina Schnorr von Carolsfeld, who, since the death of her husband, had been behaving in a very odd manner. In November of the previous year, 1866, she had gone to Tribschen with her pupil, Isidore von Reutter, to make some curious revelations to Wagner. It appeared that Isidore had held a series of conversations with the spirit of Ludwig Schnorr, who had delivered an important message, namely that Malvina was destined to become Wagner's wife while Isidore was to marry none other than the King himself. What Ludwig thought of this notion, if he heard of it, is not

known, but Wagner was incensed and forbade Isidore to enter his house again. Malvina, disappointed, angry and jealous of Cosima, stormed back to Munich and denounced Wagner and Cosima in a letter to one of Ludwig's adjutants, Hauptmann von Sauer. As soon as Ludwig had seen the letter he sent it to Cosima, telling her that he found its contents 'outrageous' but adding: '... as your sincere and eternally faithful friend I regard it as my duty to send it to you'.⁸

While on the subject of Malvina, it is worth quoting an account which she sent to Ludwig describing a curiously revealing dream that she had experienced:

Dream. I came out of a beautiful wood into a meadow, in the middle of which stood a large, handsome lion surrounded by tigers and hyenas which were tearing at him murderously while the noble animal only surveyed them contemptuously. With a cry of rage I fell upon the lion so that the cowardly killers drew back and, after a second cry, fled hastily ...⁹

On the following two nights the dream repeated itself exactly, except that the third time it ended with the lion turning into King Ludwig II. When Ludwig sent the account on to Cosima he described it as 'a strange mixture of clarity and confusion, truth and fiction'.¹⁰ He must surely have recognized the dream as a striking allegory of himself, and perhaps somewhere in his mind he had the foreboding that one day the tigers and hyenas would destroy him.

Wagner repeatedly poured scorn on Malvina and her revelations about him and Cosima, but by late 1867 it had become increasingly difficult for him to keep up the pretence. Dülflipp, for one, knew that Wagner was lying and did not conceal this from the King. On 13 December Ludwig wrote to Dülflipp:

I am surprised that you believe the situation as regards Wagner, Frau von Bülow and Frau Schnorr is not quite kosher: if it should turn out that the miserable rumour is true – which I was never able to bring myself to believe – should it after all really be a case of adultery – then alas!¹¹

No doubt the antisemitic Wagner would not have been amused if he had heard the King describing his relationships as 'not quite kosher'. By now the cat was well and truly out of the bag; yet still Wagner avoided making a clean breast of the matter, and still he and the King kept up the charade, though relations between them were now strained.

Between 30 November 1867 and 9 March 1868 no letters passed between Ludwig and Wagner, but finally Ludwig broke the silence. In his letter of 9 March he wrote that he could no longer bear being without news of his friend. He asked about Wagner's work and suggested that he might visit Triebtschen during the course of the summer or that Wagner might come

to Hohenschwangau in the late autumn so that they could re-live the glorious November days that they had spent there together three years earlier. Quoting *Die Walküre*, he said that Wagner was 'the spring which I have longed for in the frosty depths of winter'.¹²

Wagner wrote back eloquently playing the injured party. He would always be thankful, he said, for what Ludwig had done for him, but he went on to say that Ludwig was wrecking his own salvation and being drawn into a 'whirlpool of self-destruction' while Wagner's voice went unheard. 'I know,' he continued, 'that I am only welcome to you when I am silent. So why do you disturb the silence and wake the old hopeful echoes in me . . . ?' He also complained that Ludwig was not able to perceive the world and its phenomena through the eyes of the Friend. 'So I see the enemy,' he added, 'burying the roots of your worth and your power'.¹³

In his penitent reply to this, Ludwig expressed his regret that he had given any credence to the scandalous press reports about Wagner and went on to say:

The tree [presumably meaning their common work and ideals] shall stand for ever. I shall trample on the head of the serpent, for I am what I was from the beginning – God has chosen me . . . Oh my Friend, once the world seemed rosy to me and men seemed noble; since then I have suffered unspeakably bitter experiences . . . fully justified was my feeling of hate and misanthropy; only in myself, and above all in the pursuit of our ideal, was I able to find comfort and uplift; I shut myself away in myself, for I was gripped by abhorrence and shame in the face of the world. Now that phase is past; it was a process of purification, an episode in my life; I am strengthened, I will forget and forgive the dreadful things that were done to me and will throw myself bravely into life, devote myself to my solemn duties . . . for I clearly recognize my great task and will, believe me, fulfil it faithfully and conscientiously.¹⁴

Wagner, reassured, wrote back to the effect that Ludwig had redeemed himself by this letter. Men of the future would, he said, regard Ludwig II as 'the most astonishing revelation of the divine in the history of the world'. This judgement, he added, 'you have written yourself in this letter'.¹⁵

During the next few months Wagner made several journeys to and from Munich. In April he was there at the same time as the Crown Prince Friedrich of Prussia, for whom a gala performance of *Lohengrin* was given. Ludwig was in bed and unable either to attend the opera or to see Wagner. But the composer did spend his fifty-fifth birthday (22 May) with the King on the Roseninsel. A few days later he sent Ludwig a book on Buddhism, Eugène Bournouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien*, in which he had marked the passage which had first inspired the idea of writing *Die Sieger*. Ludwig wrote back thanking him and adding: 'Oh, how I look

forward to this Indian legend and its artistic representation by you.' He signed himself 'Parcival'.¹⁶

By this time preparations were in progress for a performance of *Die Meistersinger*, which Wagner had finished the previous year. A fine cast had been assembled, including Franz Nachbaur as Walther and Mathilde Mallinger as Eva. Bülow was conductor of the orchestra. Wagner took overall charge of the production, and the rehearsals went well, despite some friction between Wagner and the theatrical management, and despite the temperamental behaviour of Bülow, who was still loyal to Wagner's music but becoming increasingly hostile towards the man. It was now clear to both men that they would soon have to drop the pretence that Cosima was still faithful to Hans.

Die Meistersinger, with its tuneful music and light-hearted plot, was a far cry from the tense, elegiac world of *Tristan*. But in its own way it was just as much of a landmark: a comic opera combining exuberance and gaiety with a serious message, and full of haunting music in which Wagner fell back on old-established forms yet still spoke with an original voice. Germany had seen nothing like it before.

The final rehearsal, which was to all intents and purposes a first performance, was held on 19 June in the presence of the King, who was enchanted. It was almost like the triumphant summer of *Tristan* all over again. He wrote to Wagner afterwards saying: 'I was so moved and carried away that it was impossible for me to join in with the profane expression of praise through hand-clapping.' This time he signed himself 'Walther', the name of the opera's hero.¹⁷

On the 21st the official première was held, once again with the King attending and with friends and enemies of Wagner from all over Europe in the audience. At Ludwig's invitation Wagner was seated in the royal box, and after the second and third acts, at the King's request, he bowed his acknowledgements to the applauding audience, a gesture that was regarded by some of the aristocracy present as a shocking breach of etiquette. One astonished journalist commented as follows:

Wagner, the branded, exiled heretic, whom not much more than two years ago even the King's grace could not shield from the malignity of the upper and lower rabble of our art-metropolis, now rehabilitated in inexpressible fashion in the self-same royal box in which, till then, only royalties and their descendants had ever been seen!¹⁸

Five more performances of *Die Meistersinger* were held, but without Wagner, who had gone back to Tribschen on 24 June. It was to be eight years before he and Ludwig were to meet again. The opera had been a great success for him, yet he returned home with the intention of never again taking any practical part in a Munich production. He wrote to the

King that henceforth he would live only to create. Probably the difficulties he had encountered with the theatre management had made him more convinced than ever that he needed his own theatre where he could be complete master.

It seems likely that the matter of Cosima was also on Wagner's mind. He knew that it was bound to come to a head soon and that when it did it would cause trouble between himself and the King and make things even more difficult for him in Munich. In this he was right. On 12 July Ludwig wrote to Cosima, who was then in Munich, that the accusations about her and Wagner were being bandied about again. Wagner, when he heard about this, wrote to Ludwig on 16 July once again expressing indignation over the charges and saying that Cosima would have to leave Munich. Ludwig was clearly no longer deceived, though he still half pretended to be. On 25 July, shortly before departing to join the Russian Tsar and Tsarina at Kissingen, he wrote to Wagner urging him to try and persuade Cosima not to leave Munich as this would only encourage the evil tongues. He added: 'The memory of the *Meistersinger* days makes me joyful; it will give me strength to endure the dreadful, prosaic turmoil of the coming days at Kissingen.'¹⁹

The visit to Kissingen was made at the urging of Prince Hohenlohe, who considered that friendly relations with Russia would help to mitigate the insecure position in which Bavaria found herself in the wake of the war with Prussia. Ludwig was in Kissingen from 2-10 August and probably enjoyed his stay more than he had anticipated. On her return journey the Tsarina passed through Munich, and Ludwig invited her to stay at Berg and arranged a magnificent celebration for her, with a great firework display and a dinner on the Roseninsel which the Tsarina declared to have been the most poetic of her life.

For Ludwig's twenty-third birthday on 25 August Wagner sent him a finely bound printed score of *Die Meistersinger*, together with a dedicatory poem of four stanzas in which he praised the relationship between them. The King wrote on 14 September belatedly thanking him for this and adding that the tunes of the opera had alleviated the banality of recent weeks, when he had been obliged to visit his mother at Hohenschwangau and the Austrian emperor at Posenhofen where Sophie and her fiancé were also present – a fact which did not mitigate the boredom of the visit for him as he now found Sophie rather tedious company and her future husband equally so.

After this there was a long gap in communications between Ludwig and Wagner. Apart from a telegram sending good wishes at New Year, Wagner heard nothing from the King until 10 February 1869. After leaving several of Wagner's letters unanswered, Ludwig once more relented and wrote to the Friend thanking him for a gift of the original score of *Rienzi* and part

of *Die Meistersinger* arranged for piano. He told Wagner that his faith in the prospect of fulfilling their common ideal gave him strength to carry out his royal duties, and he asked for news of the composer's health and of his progress with work on the *Ring*.

It was the *Ring* that was soon to be the subject of a new disagreement between the composer and his patron. By the terms of Ludwig's financial settlement to Wagner, the *Ring* was to be the property of the King. The first part, *Das Rheingold*, had been completed in 1854, and Ludwig now wanted it to be performed in Munich. Wagner reluctantly agreed, and preparations began for a production scheduled to take place in the Court Theatre at the end of August. Bülow had resigned as Kapellmeister, partly because of bad health and partly because of the ignominy he was suffering as a result of Cosima's desertion. Ludwig had given him three months' leave, hoping that he would recover and reconsider the position – in fact his resignation was to be final. Meanwhile Wagner's gifted disciple and amanuensis Hans Richter was appointed as conductor. Wagner was kept informed about the preparations, and the conductor, singers, designers and stage technicians went to Tribschen during the course of the summer to consult with the master.

During rehearsals there was a lot of friction between Richter and the theatre management. The Theatre Administrator, Karl von Perfall, and his colleagues resented the young conductor's high-handed attitude, and matters came to a head after the final rehearsal on 27 August, at which the King was present. Because the stage effects were somewhat unsatisfactory, Richter sent a telegram to Wagner saying that the première, scheduled for 29 August, must be postponed, and Wagner immediately wired to the King asking him 'to order the postponement of the public performance of *Das Rheingold* to a time when the as yet unsolved difficulties of the production can be better considered'.²⁰ He suggested that in the meantime some earlier work of his be performed instead. This was sent on the eve of the scheduled first performance. Meanwhile Richter was flatly refusing to conduct with the stage effects in their present state, telling Perfall that he took his orders only from Wagner. This was in fact a calculated ploy, which was part of a discreditable plot that he and Wagner had been laying for some time with the aim of removing opposition in the theatre. The result of Richter's behaviour was that he was dismissed by Perfall with the support of Dülfiipp. Wagner now hoped that, faced with having to support either himself or Perfall, Ludwig would choose to dismiss Perfall and reinstate Richter, thus achieving Wagner's aim. But the plan misfired badly. Wagner should have known from the Tichatschek affair that Ludwig was capable of acting with steely determination in order to have his own way. The King had set his heart on having the *Rheingold* production as soon as possible and was not going to allow anyone to sabotage it.

way in which Holland links Germanic mythology with the concept of ancient wisdom inherited from the Orient.

In the event only the Grail motifs and related themes were included in the decorations for the Singers' Hall, but through Holland's notes we catch a glimpse of the surprisingly deep recesses of Ludwig's inner world. We see that the aesthetic features of his castles are only the tip of a large iceberg. The real purpose of his buildings was to provide temples which would reinforce his conception of himself as a divinely sanctioned king, one of a chain of rulers who knew the inner mysteries of Christianity and drew power therefrom.

This comes across powerfully when one enters the Throne Room at Neuschwanstein, a room which, ironically, has never contained a throne. The focal point of the chamber is the empty throne-platform, set in a great alcove and approached by a flight of white marble steps. On the gold background of the alcove behind the platform is a pattern of lions, the symbol of Bavaria, and higher up is a row of figures representing six holy kings: Stephen of Hungary; Henry VI, King of Germany and Holy Roman Emperor; Casimir of Poland; Louis IX of France (Saint Louis); Edward of England (presumably Edward the Confessor); and Ferdinand of Spain. Between the figures are palm trees representing peace, and looking down on them are Christ, the Virgin Mary and a group of angels. The plans for the room state that these kings 'through their perfection in Christian virtues stand as exemplary models and intercessors at the throne of the Eternal One'. The domed ceiling of the room is painted blue with a pattern of stars and a great sun in the centre. The floor is set with an oval mosaic depicting trees and animals of different kinds. No doubt this symbolism is intended to show that the King stands, as it were, between heaven and earth, ruling over the latter in the name of the former. Opposite the throne is a mural showing St Michael fighting the dragon, a motif which is repeated in a statue high up on the north wall of the castle and also in a mural on the eastern wall. Like the lion, the theme of Michael (or his *alter ego* St George) was a ubiquitous one in Bavaria, and Ludwig was fond of using it. There was also a special reason for featuring the motif at Neuschwanstein. Among the plans for the castle is a reference to the story that 'St Michael struck a jewel from the crown of Lucifer, and according to legend this stone fell to earth and became the Grail'.

This castle, which was intended as a temple to Wagner, was in fact never visited by the composer. The King himself stayed there for the first time in the summer of 1884, and it was there that he was taken into medical custody after being declared insane. Within a few weeks of his death the building was opened to the public. How ironic that a place which was intended as an inviolable shrine, 'sacred and out of reach', should now be exposed to the gaze of a constant stream of tourists.

Farewell to Wagner



Ludwig's last decade began with Wagner once again in the forefront of his life. For eight years they had not seen each other, although their correspondence had continued. Then, in August 1876, they were brought together again when the *Ring* was at last given its première, though not in Munich as Ludwig had originally envisaged.

Wagner, Cosima and the children had regretfully bidden farewell to Triebtschen in April 1872 and had established themselves at Bayreuth, an attractive little town in northern Bavaria which Wagner had chosen six years earlier as the site for the central temple to his art. A combination of reasons had led him to choose this particular place. He did not, if possible, want to offend Ludwig by going outside Bavaria, but had rejected Munich mainly because of the difficulties and enmity that he had encountered there in the past. Bayreuth was conveniently situated within the Bavarian borders but in a Protestant region where he felt at home, and it happened to be geographically more or less at the centre of the German-speaking world. The town also had an old opera house which, surprisingly enough, possessed the largest stage in Germany. Altogether Bayreuth seemed ideal for Wagner's purposes, and he was in any case charmed by the place.

There was, however, an awkward problem to be overcome if the complete *Ring* was to have its première at Bayreuth. It will be remembered that in 1864 Wagner had signed an agreement under which the score of the *Ring* was to be the property of King Ludwig, and he had already reluctantly abided by this agreement in the case of *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*. But he knew that if he delivered the two remaining parts, *Siegfried* and *Götterdämmerung*, Ludwig would insist on their being performed in Munich as had happened, to Wagner's chagrin, with the two earlier operas. Wagner therefore decided simply to break the agreement and withhold the scores from Ludwig. At the end of 1870, when the King pressed him for the score of *Siegfried*, he pretended that he had postponed finishing it until he had completed the first act of *Götterdämmerung*. This, however, was a barefaced lie, as the score of *Siegfried* was already complete. By the spring of 1871 the King had become aware of what lay behind Wagner's prevarication. 'I dislike Wagner's plan very much,' he wrote to

Düfflipp on 19 April. 'It will be a pure impossibility to produce the whole Nibelung cycle in Bayreuth next year.'¹ But five weeks later he was writing to Wagner describing the scheme as 'magnificent'². It is a measure of his devotion to Wagner's work that he was willing to forgive yet another example of deceit and dishonesty on the part of his old friend. By early 1872 he had given way completely to Wagner over the question of the *Ring*. It must have been galling for him to see his early hopes shattered in this way on top of all the other disillusionments that he had suffered, and it would not have been surprising if he had felt bitter and resentful towards Wagner. Yet on 3 January 1872 he wrote to the composer:

In spite of every tempest that appears to divide us, in spite of all the cloud-racks that pile up between us, our stars will yet find each other: even when the profane eye cannot pierce through the thick veil to the radiant brightness of them we two will recognize each other; and when we have at last reached the holy goal we had set ourselves from the beginning, the central sun of the eternal godhead, that light and life for which we suffered and fought undaunted we will render an account of our doings, the meaning and aim of which were to spread that light over the earth, to purify and perfect humanity with its sacred flames, making it the sharer in eternal joys.³

At first Wagner planned to produce the entire *Ring* at Bayreuth in 1872, but when he visited the Bayreuth opera house in April 1871 he realized that the auditorium was much too small and that a reconstruction was impossible. Nevertheless he was more enthusiastic than ever about Bayreuth and its environs, and he decided that there was no alternative but to build a new opera house, specially designed for Wagnerian purposes. He announced that the *Ring* would be performed in the new theatre in the summer of 1873. Once again he was being wildly optimistic, and he soon discovered that the theatre would not be ready until 1874 at the earliest. The foundation stone was laid on 22 April 1872 in pouring rain – even in the midst of his triumphs the gods seemed to go out of their way to test Wagner's endurance.

Ludwig subscribed 25,000 thalers towards the cost of the theatre, but later he agreed that the money could be used for the building of Wahnfried, Wagner's house at Bayreuth. Wagner gratefully erected a bronze bust of the King in front of the house, but adroitly manoeuvred Ludwig into paying for it. Meanwhile Wagner and Cosima had been travelling around Germany raising money for the theatre. Everywhere he was now fêted as a great German artist, but the fund-raising proceeded with frustrating slowness. Some money trickled in from the Wagner societies that had been set up in many parts of the country, and generous donations came from the Sultan of Turkey and the Khedive of Egypt, but the German princes on the whole behaved with extraordinary meanness. Because of this

disappointing response the building work proceeded much more slowly than had been anticipated. In a desperate attempt to speed up the fund-raising Wagner went on a gruelling concert tour, but there was still not enough.

By midsummer 1873 it had become clear that, although the shell of the building could be completed, only a large loan would make possible the installation of the necessary fittings and stage equipment. For such a loan a guarantor would be required, and the only possible candidate was King Ludwig II. When, however, Wagner sent an impassioned letter to Ludwig, a reply came from Düssel to the effect that the King was not prepared to help any further beyond the 25,000 thalers already subscribed – he had evidently forgotten that this money had in the end been used for Wagner's house. After launching a fruitless nationwide appeal through booksellers and music dealers, Wagner turned in desperation to the idea of appealing directly to the Kaiser via the Grand Duke of Baden. The Grand Duke refused to help, but by this time Ludwig had changed his mind. Probably he had heard about Wagner's plan to approach the Kaiser and had revolted against the idea of Prussia stepping into the breach. On 25 January 1874 he wrote to Wagner:

From the depths of my heart I beg you to forgive me for my long delay in writing to you . . . Do not be angry with me on that account dearest Friend. It is my consolation that you know me and can have no doubt that my true and genuine friendship for you and my enthusiasm for your divine, incomparable works are so deeply implanted in my soul that it would be lunacy to believe in any decline of my ardour for you and your great undertaking. No, No and again No! It shall not end thus! Help must be given! Our plan must not fail. Parsifal knows his mission and will do everything that lies in his power . . . Do not despair, but make me happy at once with a letter.

I must unfortunately confess to you that my finances are in anything but a brilliant condition at the moment; I was forced to hesitate although this is not normally in my nature.⁴

The result was that Ludwig lent Wagner 100,000 thalers which was to be repaid within a year and a half. If it had not been for this loan the Bayreuth festival theatre might have remained a shell. As it was, Ludwig's intervention saved the future of what Newman calls 'the greatest of all monuments to German art'.⁵

It was ironic that Ludwig, who had always hoped that Bavaria would be the focal point of the German cultural revival, now found himself rescuing an institution that finally annihilated this cherished ambition; for Wagner's new centre, although technically in Bavaria, was in fact a national phenomenon in a totally new sense. In retrospect the creation of the theatre can be seen as an event of supreme importance for the German people. Here, for the first time, was a temple of art where the whole of

Farewell to Wagner

Germany could worship, a place that symbolized a new national artistic consciousness. The founding of the Bayreuth theatre therefore represented on a spiritual and cultural plane what the founding of the Bismarckian Reich represented on a practical and political plane.

After many delays the theatre was finally ready to open its doors in the summer of 1876, and for the first performance a galaxy of German notables descended on Bayreuth, including the Kaiser. Ludwig, of course, came as well, but he did not go to the opening public performance. Instead he attended a general rehearsal on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th August. As always, he was anxious to avoid prying eyes, and on 12 July he had written to Wagner:

Oh, how I am looking forward, after such a long period of separation, to seeing you again at last, my sincerely loved and truly honoured friend! Anything bordering on an ovation from the public I wish strenuously to avoid; I will, I hope, be spared from banquets, audiences and visits of foreign people of rank; all such things I hate with all the force of my soul. I come to be revived and enthused by your great creation, to refresh my heart and soul, not to show myself to inquisitive gapers and to make myself available as an object for ovations.⁶

On 4 August the royal train set out for Bayreuth. The town was expecting Ludwig's arrival, and the station was richly decorated. But the King did not alight there. At about 1.30 a.m. the train stopped outside the town at the small Rollwenzel halt, where Wagner was waiting. As the King stepped out of his carriage it must have struck Wagner how heavy he had grown during their eight years of separation. Wagner, by contrast, was looking small, frail, thin and grey. The strain of the Bayreuth preparations had taken their toll. There were tears in the older man's eyes. He felt an impulse to embrace the King, but instead they shook hands. They then mounted a carriage and were taken to the Hermitage, a lovely rococo mansion near the town where the King was to stay during his visit. Here the two men talked until three in the morning.

The impression made on Ludwig by the performances he saw is evinced in the letter that he sent Wagner very shortly after his arrival back at Hohen-schwangau.

I came with great expectations; and, high though these were, they were far, far exceeded. I was so deeply moved that I might well have seemed taciturn to you . . .

Ah, now I recognize again the beautiful world from which I have held aloof; the sky looks down on me again, the meadows are resplendent with colour, the spring enters my soul with a thousand sweet sounds . . . You are a god-man, the true artist by God's grace who brought the sacred fire down from heaven to earth, to purify, to sanctify and to redeem! The god-man who truly cannot fail and cannot err!?

As a result of experiencing the words and music of the *Ring*, Ludwig

adds, he has been put into a state of 'blessed intoxication never before experienced'. He was now, he said, longing to see the *Ring* for the second time, even though this would mean attending a performance with a full audience. Once again, however, he repeated his desire to avoid publicity.

He returned to Bayreuth on 26 August, the day after his thirty-first birthday, and attended the third and last *Ring* performance on the succeeding four days, for once overcoming his aversion to public events. At the end of *Götterdämmerung*, he came to the front of his box and joined in the applause as Wagner stepped on to the stage to address the audience. In his speech Wagner said that the festival had been 'embarked upon in trust in the German spirit and completed for the glory of the King of Bavaria, who had been not only a benefactor and protector to him but a co-creator of his work'.⁸ The last phrase must have made Ludwig particularly pleased. He returned to the Hermitage for a short rest, then drove to his waiting train. This time there was no getting away from the throng that lined the route, but Ludwig did not seem displeased by this. He appeared relaxed and happy. It was, however, his last appearance before a crowd and also his last visit to Bayreuth. His loan for the theatre was not repaid in the stipulated time. On the contrary, the 1876 festival ended with a deficit, and Wagner had to make yet more demands on Ludwig's generosity. Not until 1882, the year before Wagner's death, did Bayreuth start to show a profit.

In November 1880, the year in which Bavaria celebrated the 700th anniversary of the Wittelsbach dynasty, Wagner paid a visit to Munich. At a private performance of *Lohengrin* on 10 November he and the King sat together in the royal box. It was their last face-to-face meeting. On the 12th Wagner conducted the prelude to *Parsifal*, attended by the King, Cosima and the painter Franz von Lenbach. According to Lenbach's account, relayed at second hand, this occasion was marred by disharmony. It is said that Ludwig irritated Wagner by arriving late, then annoyed him still further after the prelude by demanding a repetition. Finally, when Ludwig asked for the *Lohengrin* prelude so that he could compare the two, Wagner reportedly handed the baton to the Kapellmeister, Hermann Levi, and walked off in a huff. The story has probably been exaggerated, for Ludwig made no mention of any unpleasantness when he recorded the event in his diary. A few weeks later, at Christmas, Ludwig sent the composer a small gold model of Hohenschwangau, to serve as a paperweight, as well as a beautiful little Renaissance cabinet of ebony inlaid with silver. Moreover the two men continued to correspond as warmly as before, though Wagner was temporarily aggrieved when Ludwig declined to come to the première of *Parsifal* at Bayreuth in 1882, pleading illness.

The *Parsifal* performance was conducted by Levi, who had remained faithful to Wagner despite the latter's flagrant anti-semitism. It galled

Farewell to Wagner

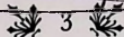
Wagner to have such a Christian work conducted by the son of a rabbi, but Levi's outstanding ability as a conductor was indispensable to him. It is interesting to note that Ludwig did not suffer from racial or religious prejudice, as is shown by a letter he wrote to Wagner on 11 October 1881:

I am glad, dear Friend, that in connection with the production of your great and holy work you make no distinction between Christian and Jew. There is nothing so nauseous, so unedifying, as disputes of this sort: at bottom all men are brothers, whatever their confessional differences.⁹

Ludwig finally saw *Parsifal* at a private performance in 1884, repeated the following year. By then, however, Wagner was dead. One February evening in 1883 Ludwig received a telegram from Venice giving the news that the Master had been struck down by a heart attack. In his sudden grief Ludwig is said to have stamped so hard that he smashed a floor tile. Henceforth the pianos in all his castles were covered over with crape. 'Wagner's corpse belongs to me,' he declared. But when the train carrying the coffin back to Bayreuth stopped at Munich for a few hours, Ludwig was not among the vast crowd that gathered at the station to pay homage. He contented himself with sending his aide-de-camp with a large wreath of palm leaves. Nor did he attend the burial at Wahnfried on 18 February. Throughout their long association Wagner had caused him both joy and anguish. Now that he was gone Ludwig must have felt more alone than ever before.

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For Maund Perceil



From Cage to Throne



Whatever his faults as a father, Max was a conscientious king, and this was to prove his undoing. By 1863 a rapid weakening of his health, which had always been uncertain, coincided with a deterioration in the political stability of the German-speaking world which kept him from taking the rest that he needed. Like the rulers of the other smaller Teutonic states, he had reason to be worried by the state of flux in which Germany found herself. The old Reich, the Holy Roman Empire, had been dissolved by Napoleon, but one vestige of it still remained in the form of a kind of Germanic United Nations called the Deutscher Bund, the German Confederation, which met at Frankfurt-am-Main and whose aim was to guarantee the integrity of all German states, regardless of size and power. This Confederation was, however, threatened by two things: first, by the growing movement for national unity, which aimed at a far more closely-knit Germany than the loose Confederation allowed for; secondly, by the rivalry between the group's two strongest members, Austria and Prussia. The latter state possessed in Bismarck a politician of formidable force. Ruthless, unscrupulous, devious and brilliantly clever, he was utterly dedicated to the advancement of Prussia. His policies were to bring about changes in Europe whose effects are still being felt today.

King Max II had refused to take sides with either of the two giants. He advocated a triad concept with a south German grouping under Bavaria's leadership acting as a balancing third force in the Confederation, though this was made difficult by the South's lack of military strength and by the dynastic jealousies between Württemberg and Saxony. When a meeting of the Confederation was called by Austria in August 1863 to discuss changes in the constitution, Max felt obliged to attend.

As it turned out this was one of the most ill-fated gatherings of the century. Had the Confederation been allowed to develop with the wholehearted support of all German states it might have drawn the old empire together again peacefully and enabled it to take on a new lease of life. But that was not Bismarck's plan. He was set upon creating a brand new Reich under Prussian leadership, with the exclusion of Austria which he distrusted. He therefore threatened to resign as Prime Minister if

Prussia sent a delegate to Frankfurt. Without Prussia's participation the conference ended abortively.

Meanwhile Bismarck was planning his next move, which was to take advantage of the Schleswig-Holstein crisis. This came about when King Frederick VII of Denmark died in 1863 without direct heirs and was succeeded by Prince Christian IX of Holstein-Glücksberg, thus bringing the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein into Danish territory. This was opposed by the rival claimant, the Duke of Augustenburg, who had the support of Austria and Prussia.

While the crisis was brewing, Max II had at last agreed to take a rest cure and was recovering in Italy from rheumatism of the joints. But in the middle of January 1864 an emissary was sent from Munich to tell him that the Schleswig-Holstein affair had reached serious proportions and that his presence in the capital was urgently needed. Max, who favoured an independent Schleswig-Holstein, heeded the call of duty and returned, despite the fact that he could do nothing to prevent the joint Austro-Prussian occupation of the duchies in February 1864. He might have served his country better by staying in Italy to complete his recovery, for after his return he developed a fever and his condition rapidly worsened.

Bulletins about King Max's health kept being sent to Ludwig, but they were on the whole misleadingly optimistic. On 25 February came the message: 'His Majesty the King is better in every way.' Then on 27 February it was reported: 'The fever of His Majesty the King has completely gone and the catarrh is getting better.'

Ludwig was sufficiently unworried to attend a performance of *Lohengrin* on 21 February with Albert Niemann in the leading role. Niemann, with his fine voice and striking looks, was for Ludwig the ideal Lohengrin. Further performances were ordered, and the singer was invited to a series of audiences with the Prince. Ludwig also sent Niemann bunches of flowers and a pair of jewelled cuff-links with a swan design.

In the eyes of many Munich people this preoccupation with an opera singer at such a time was disrespectful towards his sick father and showed a lack of concern about the worsening Schleswig-Holstein crisis. Ludwig, however, did not grasp, or did not want to grasp, the seriousness of his father's condition. And as for the Schleswig-Holstein affair, it bored him, as he confided to Anna in a letter of 7 March. 'I am sick of this eternal Schleswig-Holstein business . . . Please don't show this to anybody!!!'¹

But he could not ignore reality for long. Early on the morning of 10 March 1864, Max lay dying in the Residenz. At 4.00 a.m. he received the last sacraments, and at 5.00 the bells of Munich rang out, calling the people to say a final desperate prayer for the salvation of their King. At 8.30 Max saw the two Princes. What passed between father and sons is

not recorded, but we can assume that Max gave Ludwig a few last words of advice and wished him well in his coming new responsibilities.

Max's hold on life grew steadily weaker throughout the day, and towards midnight the Archbishop of Munich stood up from the King's bedside where he had been kneeling with members of the family and walked into the crowded anteroom.

'Is the King still alive?' he was asked.

'Yes,' he replied 'he is alive in heaven.'²

Everyone in the room started to weep. In the bedroom Ludwig was standing near his father's body when a page first addressed him as 'Your Majesty'. He went suddenly pale. He had known for years that this moment would arrive, but now, when he heard himself addressed as King, he felt the full and awesome realization of his new position.

Two days later, while Max's body lay in state, the new King was installed in a ceremony held in the throne room of the Residenz. After all the great notables of Bavaria had been assembled there, placed in strict order of precedence, Ludwig, dressed in military uniform and accompanied by the high officers of the realm and his personal staff, passed through the ornate state apartments into the throne room itself. If he was nervous Ludwig showed no sign of it. Carrying himself with noble bearing, he mounted the wide, semi-circular steps and, standing before the throne, surveyed the assembly while the officers of the realm and members of the Cabinet took up their positions around him and below him on the steps. When he spoke to take the oath of the constitution several officers present were almost moved to tears by the solemnity and emotion in his voice. As Bavaria had no coronation ceremony as such, when he had taken the oath he was officially King, and it only remained for the Prime Minister, von Schrenk, to read the speech from the throne.

The public's first glimpse of the new King came during the funeral procession for Max, in which Ludwig and Otto walked behind the coffin as it was carried through the crowded streets by a deliberately roundabout route from the chapel of the Residenz to its final resting-place in the church of the Theatines, where sixteen years earlier Lola Montez had taken refuge from the mob.

Ludwig was dressed in the uniform of a colonel of his infantry regiment. He was then rather too thin for his enormous height, and his clothes hung on him as though too big. Nor was he handsome in the conventional sense, with his pale face, prominent ears and sloping shoulders. But these defects in a subtle way increased his impact. The eye was first held fascinated by his rather odd figure; then one became aware of the peculiar radiance that he possessed – in his large, soulful eyes, in the dignity of his bearing and in the serene intensity of his whole presence. The charismatic impression that he made on the people

of Munich that day has become legendary. Here is how one observer, Julius Hey, described the occasion:

The pale young King walked in the middle of the procession beside his chubby younger brother. Ludwig's sad expression naturally aroused the sympathy of everyone and immediately won him the hearts of the citizens, who shared his grief. If only you could have seen him, this pale young man, as he walked with bowed head and faltering step behind the coffin of his beloved father! He had extraordinarily expressive eyes . . . The whole impression given by his appearance was both moving and regal.³

The favourable impression made by Ludwig on the crowds was shared by the officials and others who came into close contact with him during the early part of his reign. In fact seldom has a King started with so much promise. Ludwig entered on his new life with exemplary zeal, and when confronted with a decision to make would often ask: 'What would my father have done?' Feeling that he needed to learn thoroughly about the government of his country, he arranged for a different minister to come every day of the week to instruct him. One of them was the Minister of Justice, Eduard von Bomhard, who describes the experience in his memoirs as follows:

These sessions took place every week on the day allocated. One took one's seat on the sofa beside the King, and it was a pleasure to see the wide open expression in his eyes when some part of the conversation specially interested him. The King's demeanour had a certain degree of natural youthful shyness, which became him, but was at the same time impressively regal. He listened to one's discourse with great attentiveness, often looking searchingly into one's eyes. Afterwards he would talk about general things, but always the loftier questions of the day, never about mundane gossip of court and town . . . He was mentally gifted in the highest degree, but the contents of his mind were stored in a totally disordered fashion.⁴

It is interesting to learn from this description that Ludwig never talked about 'mundane gossip' but only about higher things. It was one of his characteristics that he always kept his mind fixed on a star and hated to have it brought down to earth. This was to be another cause of his isolation. When reality failed to live up to his ideals he shut out reality. A sense of humour would have helped him to keep his feet on the ground, but Ludwig showed only rare traces of humour. There is, for example, hardly a joke or even a mildly funny passage in the entire five volumes of his correspondence with Wagner. Otto, by contrast, had a natural wit and a quicksilver quality which was lacking in his more self-conscious brother.

Ludwig's daily routine would begin with an early breakfast, followed by a visit to his mother. Then, from 8.30 to 9.30 or 10.00 he would confer with his Cabinet Secretary, Franz von Pfistermeister or another member of the secretariat. At 11.00 he would have his daily session with one of the

ministers, then a second breakfast followed at 12.00 by an audience. He would dine at 4.00 p.m. then see one of the secretariat again, after which Count Leinfelder would read extracts from the newspapers until it was time to close the official day with tea at 9.00.

Leinfelder was a kind of court archivist and general aide who had also worked for Max II and had been a member of the royal staff since Ludwig's childhood – it was he who had taken Ludwig to that crucial performance of *Lohengrin*. One of Ludwig's first actions after becoming King was to re-appoint the old retainer to the job of making extracts from the newspapers and from relevant literature. During the reading sessions Ludwig was always very considerate to Leinfelder, drawing up a chair for him, peeling him oranges, offering him glasses of wine and asking after the condition of his sick mother.

There is an anecdote concerning Leinfelder which throws an interesting light on Ludwig's character. When Ludwig was about twelve he was asked by an old woman near Hohenschwangau for some money. Reaching into his pocket, he found that he had nothing left of his monthly allowance, so he stopped Leinfelder who was passing at that moment and asked him for the loan of a six-florin piece. Leinfelder obliged, and Ludwig gave the money to the old woman. Ten years later, when Ludwig was King, he reminded Leinfelder of the debt and presented him with a brooch containing a pearl the size of a six-florin coin. The story illustrates Ludwig's natural generosity and also his remarkable memory, especially where kindnesses were concerned.

Leinfelder's devotion to Ludwig is illustrated by a remark he made to Count de la Rosée. Two days after Max's death Leinfelder had met the Count on the stairs of the Residenz and, expressing his grief, had added that 'our only consolation is that we now have an angel on the throne'. Ludwig's old tutor, having a more sceptical view of the young monarch's character, had merely remarked that Max's death was the greatest tragedy that could ever have happened to Bavaria.⁵

Soon after this la Rosée fell fatally ill, and Ludwig hurried to see him, for despite the frustrations he had suffered at his tutor's hands he had come to respect and perhaps even like the old soldier. There might also have been an element of guilt at not having lived up to la Rosée's expectations of him as a pupil. When he arrived at the house he was at first prevented from entering by a servant girl who did not recognize him – though when she discovered her mistake she went down on her knees to beg forgiveness, which Ludwig no doubt readily gave. He paid his respects to the dying man and next day, after la Rosée's death, spent an hour consoling the bereaved family.

An intimate picture of the young King, at ease in the country and in the company of his mother and brother, is given in a description by Bomhard,

writing of his meeting with Ludwig at Hohenschwangau on 27 September 1864 after his appointment as Minister of Justice. The account is also interesting because of the light which it throws on Ludwig's incipient schizophrenic tendencies.

I was struck by the way in which every now and then, just when his expression and whole demeanour seemed to show contentment, he would suddenly straighten up and – looking around him with a serious, even stern, expression – would reveal something dark in himself that was in complete contrast to the youthful charm of a moment ago. I thought to myself: 'If two different natures are germinating in this young man, as it has seemed to me from the very first conversation with him, may God grant that the good one may be victorious.'

Later they were joined by the Queen and Otto for a meal, after which they sat on a balcony of the castle, a beautiful view in front of them, while Ludwig talked widely and impressively about books, history and state affairs. Then Ludwig and Bomhard boarded a carriage to go for a ride, arranging to rendezvous with the Queen and Otto at a spot some distance from the castle. Bomhard's account continues as follows:

After an hour's journey we climbed out, and the King sent the carriage and servants back; we were alone in the vastness of the mountains. Suddenly the King declared that he had lost the way . . . A peasant girl, when asked for directions, fled in embarrassment; darkness was falling, and I was very worried. At last we heard the barking of dogs and went towards the sound. Then we saw torchlight approaching us. The anxious Queen had sent people out to look for us. We found her, together with Prince Otto, two ladies-in-waiting and two aides-de-camp, in front of a peasant house, sitting at a table in the open air. I had to sit down between the Queen and Prince Otto. The Queen herself spread butter on bread and served up coffee and beer. Relaxed, convivial conversation followed. I travelled back in a carriage with the King, Queen and Prince under the magnificent starry sky . . .⁶

After further acquaintances with the King, Bomhard wrote: 'He placed great value on feeling that his heart was pure and that his soul was chaste and unsullied . . . He gloried passionately in everything beautiful, great and noble, in the most exalted ideals.'⁷

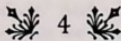
In the arts Ludwig sought to have his ideals projected into word and image. He loved Schiller, for example, for his lofty conceptions of heroism, and it was through a Schiller play that he first met the actor Ernst Possart, who was to play an important part in his theatrical interests. Possart performed before Ludwig for the first time in October 1864, in the unsympathetic role of the scheming secretary, Wurm, in Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe*. Ludwig was impressed by Possart's acting in the early part of the play and in the interval sent his aide-de-camp to congratulate the theatre director on having engaged the actor. This compliment, relayed to Possart

in his dressing-room, spurred him on to even better acting in the latter part of the play, and after the final curtain the King stood in his box applauding while the audience called out Possart's name. Possart was invited to an audience with Ludwig, and two days later he reported at the Residenz in a very nervous mood. His account of the visit in his autobiography proceeds as follows:

I was shown into a wide, three-windowed room with light blue wallpaper, in the middle of which was a clump of enormous potted palms. Anxious moments passed; nothing broke the stillness. Suddenly I gave a start when out from the greenery stepped a slim figure, towering above average human height and approaching me slowly and ceremoniously. I was breathless. Raising myself from a deep bow I found this majestic figure close in front of me; I had to tilt my head sharply backwards in order to look him in the face. But my gaze could take in nothing but two powerful, steel-grey eyes,* framed in dark eyelashes, which looked penetratingly into my own and held them captive . . . Now the King was speaking to me in a quiet, kindly-sounding tone, but I could not grasp the words – I just looked spellbound at those lofty, shining stars.⁸

Possart was one of the many people from the world of the arts – actors, actresses, poets, painters, architects, composers – with whom Ludwig felt a rapport. But one artist loomed larger in his life than any other single person. This was Richard Wagner, and it is to his curious relationship with the composer that we must now turn our attention.

* Considering that Ludwig's eyes were thought to be so striking, it is odd that people disagreed about their colour. Some described them as blue.



The Coming of the Friend



Gloomy weather hung over Munich in late March, 1864, as though spring were waiting a decent interval after the death of the old King before signalling to the population that they could begin celebrating the advent of the new. In such an atmosphere few people would have noticed the arrival in the town of a middle-aged composer, en route from Vienna to Switzerland to escape his creditors. Six weeks later he was to be back in Munich as an honoured guest, his financial problems at an end, but for the moment he walked through the streets unobtrusively.

Any passer-by who happened to recognize him as Richard Wagner, composer and librettist of *Rienzi*, *The Flying Dutchman*, *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*, might have reflected that he looked rather unlike the heroes of any of his operas. He was slight in build and carried himself with a rather hunched bearing, as though his small body had trouble in supporting his head – a head so large that a Regent Street hatter had once had great difficulty in fixing him up with a top hat. His pale face was etched with tightly drawn lines, giving it a somewhat harsh appearance. Forehead, nose and chin jutted forward aggressively. In this striking face was set a pair of alert, heavy-lidded eyes which, according to one of his biographers, Judith Gautier, were ‘as blue as the Lake of Lucerne’.

As he passed a shop window on his walk through Munich these eyes were caught by a photograph of the young King, which made him stop and look. Wagner later wrote that the portrait caused him to be ‘stirred by the special emotion that beauty and youth arouse in us’.¹ It was his first glimpse of the man whose life was to become so intimately bound up with his own in one of the stormiest, most incongruous and most fruitful friendships in history – a friendship that was of tremendous importance to the lives of both men.

In order to understand the significance of this friendship it is necessary to appreciate the colossal impact of Wagner, not only on music but on the whole world of the arts as well as on ideas and politics – an impact whose tremors are still being felt today. It is a measure of Wagner’s importance that more books and articles are said to have been written about him than about any other historical figure with the exceptions of Jesus Christ, Karl

Marx and Napoleon. He is also immortalized in the word 'Wagnerian', an epithet which can be used to apply to so many different things, from a musical phrase to a large and noisy mother-in-law. Who was Richard Wagner? What did he stand for? What was the secret of his hold over Ludwig? And what was Ludwig's importance to him? To answer these questions we must know something of his life and work.

Richard Wagner was born in Leipzig, Saxony, in 1813, the youngest in a family with eight children. Ostensibly he was the son of the police actuary, Carl Friedrich Wagner, but it has been argued with some plausibility that his real father was the actor, Ludwig Geyer, who lodged with the family during his seasons in Leipzig. Carl Friedrich died six months after Richard's birth, and his widow, Johanna, married Geyer the following year, soon afterwards moving to Dresden. Geyer was a talented performer and had a good enough singing voice to be used occasionally for small opera parts. Though he died when Richard was only eight, he must have helped to plant the seeds of Wagner's later development.

Early on the boy showed signs of a highly-strung disposition and an imagination that was often painfully vivid. He soon became addicted to the theatrical milieu to which Geyer had introduced him, and almost as soon as he had learned to read he was planning dramas on a Shakespearian scale. While he could still do little more than play the piano with two fingers he was dreaming of continuing the work of Beethoven, whose 7th Symphony intoxicated him when he first heard it. He also loved Weber's *Der Freischütz*, which had set young Germany ablaze after its initial performance in 1821, striking an early blow at the predominance of the Italian operatic tradition in Germany.

Initially his ambitions lay solely in the field of drama, but by his fifteenth year the spell of music had taken as firm a hold on him as that of the theatre; and, with the boldness and determination that characterized his whole life, he began to teach himself composition. By the age of sixteen he was writing piano sonatas, and by seventeen had had his first orchestral piece performed. Meanwhile he was living a wild life, drinking heavily, taking part in riotous student escapades and discovering the magnetic power he had over women.

After a brief appointment as a solo and chorus rehearser at the Würzburg theatre, he entered on a wandering existence that was to continue for most of his life. He became musical director to a theatre troupe and married one of the actresses in it, Minna Planer, a step which he was to regret during most of the quarter century that the disastrous marriage lasted, for Minna was never able to understand the original artist in him. He held a two-year appointment as Kappellmeister at Riga in Russia, fled from his creditors to London, then proceeded to Paris where he lived in extreme poverty and failed to interest the musical world in his

The Coming of the Friend

creations. He was saved by being made Kapellmeister at the Dresden Court Opera after the performance there of his opera *Rienzi*, which scored a resounding success. But in 1849 he took an active part in a violent insurrection in the town, the purpose of which was to set up a revolutionary government. When the revolt was crushed Wagner fled with a price on his head to Zürich, where he remained for ten years, outlawed from the whole of Germany until 1860 when he was partially amnestied by the King of Saxony. His full amnesty came in 1862.

A second attempt to conquer Paris failed, and in 1863 he settled at Penzing, near Vienna. His debts, however, were mounting ever higher. It was not only his profligate spending that was to blame for this; he was also a victim of the iniquitous system of paying composers at that time. Most of the German theatres secured the rights of limitless performance of a work after paying its creator an initial sum that was often derisory in comparison with what it earned for the theatre. Thus, while Wagner's operas were being produced throughout Germany to public acclaim, he was often without the money to continue composition.

By this time, however, he was a force to be reckoned with in the operatic and musical world. After *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman* he had become more boldly original in his composition. The music of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* was something strikingly new and had given audiences a foretaste of the even more revolutionary work that was to come. The poem of his *Ring des Nibelungen* was finished and published, and he had written the music for the first two of the *Ring* operas, *Das Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*, and for part of the third, *Siegfried*. He also carried with him the unfinished *Meistersinger* and the completed *Tristan und Isolde* which, however, no opera house had yet been able to stage. In addition he had written a number of essays and books setting out his artistic and philosophical ideas. Already there was a 'Wagnerian' school of thought growing up, with its fervent opponents and supporters, one of Wagner's most loyal allies being Franz Liszt, whose daughter Cosima he later married.

An anecdote related by Thomas Mann brings home just how original and epoch-making Wagner's work was. One evening, after a performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Munich, Mann left the opera house in the company of Bruno Walter, who had conducted the orchestra. They walked in silence for a while, then Walter turned and said: 'You know, that's not just music any more.' What he meant was that Wagner not only fused music and drama in a way that had never been done before, but in so doing stretched the potentialities of music to a point where it became something of a different order.

Wagner realized that this capacity of music could be used not merely to enhance a story by linking it with a series of tunes but to make the listener feel the story in the very depths of his being. His capacity to produce

music that would do this was matched by his capacity to create poetry and drama of extraordinary elemental force which explored such eternal themes as religion, power, ambition, adultery, incest and greed. The fact that many people found the presentation of these themes uncomfortable and dangerous, yet were irresistibly drawn along by the power of the music that went with them, is one of the reasons why Wagner's work was, and still is, so controversial.

Another reason lay in the innovations of his musical technique, which – apart from such devices as the *Leitmotif* – relied heavily on what is known as 'chromaticism', that is the use of the intermediate notes in a scale – those that we see as black keys on the piano, given the scale of C major. These notes lie outside the diatonic sequence, so that when we hear them we feel a need to return to the firm ground of the 'white' notes. They create uncertainty and psychological tension in the listener, which can be played upon by the composer.

Western music has seen the increasing use of chromaticism, especially from the nineteenth century onwards. Chopin, Liszt and Berlioz all exploited it (though mainly in a decorative way). But Wagner went further into the chromatic realm than anyone had done before – indeed at times he went almost as far as it is possible to go without using a different musical scale altogether as Schoenberg did. The prelude to *Tristan und Isolde* is a good example of the effectiveness of this technique. The music builds up tension, momentarily releases it, then builds it up again until the listener is floating in an eerie but exhilarating limbo. In other words the music has the effect of inducing a kind of mystical ecstasy. When such music is allied to strong archetypal imagery woven into dramatic form the result is something akin to magical ritual. Thus Wagner enthusiasts tend to approach performances of his work in a spirit of worship – that is in an expectation of something higher than the enjoyment afforded by most music or drama.

Often people with little previous knowledge of music or enthusiasm for it are nevertheless carried away when they come into contact with the powerful ethos and atmosphere of the Wagnerian world. Much of Wagner's early support is said to have come from people of this type, who were less put off by his radical technical innovations than those with more musical knowledge. It has also been claimed that Ludwig was one of these 'non-musical' Wagnerites. Indeed Wagner himself said that Ludwig had no real understanding of music.

However, to talk about 'non-musical' Wagnerites or to call Ludwig one is, I think, to oversimplify matters. As we have seen, each of Wagner's operas forms a totality, in which words, music and action are fused (although the term *Gesamtkunstwerk*, 'total work of art' is used to apply only to the operas after *Lohengrin*). Many people fail to respond at all to

The Coming of the Friend

Wagner, but anyone who does respond deeply must, given the nature of the work, respond to the whole. Thus when we talk about a 'non-musical' or 'musically uneducated' Wagnerite, what we really mean is someone in whom Wagner's work has awakened a degree of musical response through the power of the totality.

This, I believe, is the way it was with Ludwig. The fact that he abandoned the piano after five years of lessons means very little – Wagner himself was a poor pianist until quite late in life, never becoming more than competent, and his remarks about Ludwig being unmusical are typical of the dismissive way that he often spoke when it came to other people's musical understanding. Although Ludwig was drawn to Wagner initially by the mythology of the Wagnerian world, we know from eyewitness accounts how deeply moved he was by, for example, *Lohengrin*, and it is impossible that the music could have played no part in this.

The essential thing about Ludwig's attitude to Wagner's work is the element of worship that I have mentioned. Ludwig understood perfectly Wagner's concept of his works as serving to lift the audience on to a higher plane. This, for Ludwig, was the function of all the best art, but in Wagner it reached its peak. The Wagnerian ritual and mystique satisfied him so completely that in the end it partially supplanted even his deep Catholicism, so that towards the end of his life he observed the rites of the Church only outwardly.

At the same time Ludwig fully appreciated the practical and technical problems that Wagner faced in launching his new art form, and particularly the unfinished *Ring*, which was clearly going to be even more difficult to stage than any of his earlier works. In view of the limitations of the German musical world at the time, Wagner had set himself a colossal undertaking, and by carrying it through he was to change the whole musical arena. It is in this, as much as in his originality as a composer, that his significance lies.

Great innovative thinkers challenge the technical capacities of their age. Wagner forced the musical technology of his era to rise to his demands and so pushed the evolution of German music and musicianship forward. This was no mean achievement when one considers the stagnant condition of the German musical world as Wagner found it. The low social status of musicians and composers, the derisory salaries for musical posts, the exploitation of composers by theatres and publishers, the restricted state of music publishing, the low standard of orchestral performance and interpretation – all these conditions militated against any attempts to extend the frontiers of music. As a young man Wagner found that most German orchestras had not the faintest idea of how to give a faithful rendering of a Beethoven symphony. And in opera the problems were even greater. Because of the long-standing dominance of the Italian

tradition it was extremely difficult to find German singers of the right quality. As late as 1867, when *Lohengrin* was being prepared for Munich, there was only one tenor in the whole of Germany on whom Wagner could rely for the leading role, namely the fifty-nine-year-old Josef Tichatschek. Added to this were the physical problems posed by the inadequacy of most theatres to cope with works on the scale of Wagner's operas.

By the end of Wagner's life all this had changed. He had lifted the status of the composer to that of a seer, raised the standard of musicianship, brought into being a whole new school of singing and conducting, built the revolutionary Bayreuth opera house, and created in Germany an operatic tradition that was the admiration of the world. Furthermore the mythology which he welded together and the ideology which he promulgated played a key role in the launching of a new German nationalism.

But all this would have seemed a remote prospect to the penniless fugitive who passed through Munich in March 1864. Had Ludwig not come into his life it is doubtful whether Wagner would have lived to see these achievements. His impact would have been much slower to take effect and would probably have been smaller. Ludwig was probably the only man in Germany who had a thorough understanding of Wagner's ideas as well as the tremendous financial resources necessary to bring them to fruition.

While Wagner was hurrying through the Bavarian capital, Ludwig, unaware that his hero was passing the doorstep, was already making plans to seek Wagner out. One day he asked his Cabinet Secretary, Franz von Pfistermeister, whether Wagner's name was on the current Munich strangers' list. Pfistermeister replied that there were many Wagners; which one did His Majesty have in mind? Ludwig replied that for him there was only one Wagner: Richard Wagner. And he ordered the Cabinet Secretary to find the composer forthwith.

Pfistermeister must have thought himself singularly ill-suited for such a mission. About forty-four years old at the time, he was a public servant of the old school: somewhat narrow and conservative in outlook and a bit of a plodder, but stout-hearted, dependable, hard-working and conscientious. In appearance he was somewhat schoolmasterish, heavy-faced and bespectacled with a moustache and goatee beard. He probably knew little about the man he was seeking, apart from Wagner's reputation as a revolutionary, and he must have shaken his head over the strange whim of his young master. But he was loyal and eager to please, and so on 14 April this unlikely emissary set out for Vienna.

On arrival he found that Wagner was not at his house in Penzing. After making inquiries he discovered that the composer was in financial difficulties and had sought refuge with his friend Frau Eliza Wille at Mariafeld, near Meilen on Lake Zürich. Pfistermeister did not go straight

The Coming of the Friend

to Switzerland, but reported back on 20 April to Ludwig in Munich, where the court was in mourning after the death of Princess Augusta, wife of Ludwig's uncle, Prince Luitpold. This delayed resumption of the search until the 30th, when Pfistermeister left Munich for Lindau on Lake Constance where he spent the night. The following day, 1 May, he crossed the lake and travelled to Mariafeld. Once again he was too late. The Master had gone to Stuttgart, where his friend Karl Eckert was Kapellmeister at the Royal Opera.

So to Stuttgart went Pfistermeister. On Monday, 2 May, Wagner was spending the evening with the Eckerts when a card was brought to him bearing the name of a man describing himself as 'Secretary to the King of Bavaria'. Wagner, suspecting a trick on the part of a creditor, sent word that he was not there, but when he returned to his hotel he was told by the landlord that a persistent gentleman from Munich wished to see him on urgent business. He therefore reluctantly made an appointment for the following morning and slept badly that night. At ten o'clock Pfistermeister was shown into Wagner's room. Introducing himself as Cabinet Secretary to His Majesty King Ludwig of Bavaria, he expressed his pleasure at having found Wagner at last, handed him a photograph of the King and a ring of Ludwig's as tokens of regard, and conveyed a verbal message to the effect that Ludwig was the composer's most ardent admirer, that everything Wagner needed would be placed at his disposal in Munich, and that the *Ring* would be produced there.

Wagner was flabbergasted and went off in a high state of excitement to tell the Eckerts the good news. The next day he wrote a letter to the King in the florid, gushing style that was to characterize their whole prolific correspondence:

Dear, gracious King!

These tears of heavenly emotion I send to you to tell you that now the marvel of poetry has come as a divine reality into my poor, love-thirsty life! And that life, to its last poetry and tones, belongs now to you my gracious young King: dispose of it as you would your own property! In the greatest joy, faithful and true, your obedient

Richard Wagner
Stuttgart, 3 May 1864²

The same day, Wagner, lacking the necessary cash, settled his hotel bill by handing over a valuable snuff-box which had been presented to him in Russia. He then borrowed the fare for a first-class rail ticket and boarded the five o'clock train for Munich in the company of Pfistermeister. Arriving at 10.30, he took a room at the Hotel Bayerischerhof, then, as now, one of the best in the city. Meanwhile Pfistermeister hurried off to the Residenz where he found Ludwig sitting up in bed. Pfistermeister told him the good

news, and Ludwig, with the occasional disregard which he showed when he was excited, kept his tired and hungry Cabinet Secretary standing until midnight while he talked. It was arranged that the King would receive Wagner at two o'clock the following afternoon.

Accordingly Wagner presented himself at the Residenz at the appointed time, dressed in evening suit and white tie. At 2.15 he was ushered into the audience chamber. The Master and his disciple came face to face for the first time. Each was deeply moved: Wagner by the youth, beauty and charisma of the King, Ludwig by the presence of the man he had idolized for so long.

For once both of these garrulous men must have been somewhat at a loss for words, but they soon overcame this and entered into an eager conversation which lasted for an hour and a half. What they talked about is not recorded, but we can surmise that it concerned Wagner's work and the details of his future life in Munich. Afterwards Ludwig asked Pfistermeister to order a portrait and bust of Wagner to go with the portraits of Shakespeare and Beethoven in his study.

The same evening Wagner wrote to Frau Wille: 'You know that the young King of Bavaria sent for me. Today I was presented before him.' And he added prophetically: 'He is, alas, so beautiful, spiritual, soulful and splendid that I fear his life must run away like a fleeting, heavenly dream in this common world.'¹³

There has sometimes been speculation that the relationship between Ludwig and Wagner might have had a homosexual element. But I believe this can be ruled out. There is no evidence that Wagner, in his whole philandering life, ever had homosexual inclinations. As for Ludwig, although he was at least a latent homosexual, his later infatuations were all directed towards young and handsome men. Wagner, at the time he met Ludwig, was just approaching his fiftieth birthday – in other words there were thirty-two years between them – and he was not a very attractive-looking man in the conventional sense. We must also remember that Ludwig was particularly averse to physical ugliness in human beings, and his devotion to Wagner must have been in spite of rather than because of Wagner's physical traits. It is true that in their letters they constantly used such words as 'love' and 'devotion', but this kind of language would have been fairly common between two close friends at that time. It was a style which went with the high plane of intensity on which they carried on their relationship. That relationship was, we must conclude, not of a homosexual nature, but was a friendship of a very special kind.

Friendship can be a powerful catalyst. The greatness of many a man of genius has been helped to realization through the nourishment, stimulus and sympathy of a kindred soul. One thinks of Boswell and Johnson, Marx and Engels, Rimbaud and Verlaine, Goethe and Schiller. Such friendships

The Coming of the Friend

are rare, especially when the friends are as different as Ludwig and Wagner were. Here were two individuals widely separated in age, rank and cast of mind, but both of them egocentric, arrogant and temperamental – an explosive recipe for a relationship. Explode it did on many occasions, but it lasted for nearly twenty years. And again and again, as we explore Ludwig's life, we shall see in it the influence of that friendship.

The Second Lola



In 1864 the American Civil War was at its height and Karl Marx was in London busy founding the First International. This was also the year when the Italian criminologist, Cesare Lombroso, published his book *Genius and Madness*, and when Holman Hunt painted *The Shadow of Death* – diverse events that are stuck, perhaps prophetically, into the scrapbook of history on the same page as the accession of Ludwig II to the throne. In two years Germany was to be embroiled in an equally disastrous war between north and south, and half a century later Ludwig's capital was to be the scene of a short-lived Marxist revolution. Genius and madness, some would say, contended for the soul of Ludwig, and even then the as yet invisible shadow of death hung over him.

But the spring of 1864 was for Ludwig like the dawning of a new era. He was at an age when life seems to be charged with infinite possibility. What was more, he had just become a King, and now he had at his side the man whom he worshipped above all others. The day after their first meeting he wrote to Wagner, still addressing his new friend somewhat shyly:

Honoured Sir!

I have asked Court Counsellor Pfistermeister to discuss with you the question of a suitable dwelling. Rest assured that I shall do everything in my power to compensate you for past sufferings. I wish to remove for ever from your shoulders the lowly cares of everyday life and to give you the peace that you long for, so that the mighty wings of your genius can unfold in the pure ether of your joyous art!

The immediate necessity was to meet Wagner's financial needs, and initially he was given an annual allowance of 4,000 gulden, or florins. This was a large sum by the standard of the day (see Appendix, p. 205, for a comparison of monetary values), and it was later doubled. When one considers that an advocate at the Bavarian Supreme Court was paid 2,800 florins, and a senior civil servant with eighteen years' service received 3,900 florins, it is easy to understand the resentment which Wagner's favoured treatment aroused. In addition he was given 16,000 florins towards the partial settlement of his debts in Vienna – a further 40,000, came in October to clear the remainder. The total sum which Wagner cost

* D. T. I urged him to tell the King of all his miseries. That would prove a grand boulevard out

the open confessions of this young man with his incurable forgiveness

the royal treasury during his entire stay in Munich amounted to about 99,400 florins.

On 9 May Wagner went to Vienna to settle his most urgent debts, and came back four days later bringing his servants Franz and Anna Mrazeck, their baby and his old dog Pohl – throughout his life Wagner had an inordinate fondness for dogs. On his return he established himself and his household at the Villa Pellet on Lake Starnberg, which meanwhile had been rented as his home for the summer at the King's expense. The house was a solid, three-storeyed building somewhat in the style of a large chalet, looking on to the lake and set in a wooded landscape. Its great advantage from Ludwig's point of view was that it lay only a short distance along the lake from Berg castle, one of Ludwig's favourite retreats, a cosy doll's house of a palace with little turrets and mock battlements. Like Hohenschwangau, it had been completely renovated by Ludwig's father. On the opposite shore of the lake was the castle of Possenhofen, home of Ludwig's great-uncle, Duke Max in Bayern, the father of Elisabeth, Empress of Austria and her younger sister Sophie – two women who were later to play important roles in Ludwig's life.

It was at Berg that Ludwig and Wagner spent a kind of honeymoon during the latter part of May and the early part of June 1864. Wagner described this idyllic interlude in a letter written to Mathilde Maier on 18 May.

The young King is a quarter of an hour away from me in his little castle of Berg where he is having a short stay and which he visits in the summer from time to time. He has me fetched and brought to him every day . . . I read my works to him, and when anything is unclear he asks eagerly for an explanation and shows deep involvement and great powers of comprehension; his attentiveness is often staggering, and his beautiful features register deep sorrow or great joy depending on how I affect his mood.²

cookup
Wagner's
essays

The way in which Wagner knew how to speak to Ludwig's innermost convictions is shown by the essay, *On State and Religion*, which the composer wrote at the King's request while the latter was away at the spa town of Kissingen in Bavaria meeting an assemblage of royalty including the Emperor and Empress of Austria, the Tsar and Tsarina of Russia and the heir to the throne of Württemberg and his wife. This essay of Wagner's belies the widely-held view that Wagner was a muddled thinker and writer when he strayed outside the field of music and drama. It is a somewhat bizarre but brilliantly argued analysis of the nature of kingship and its relation to religion and art. For the following summary of it I rely on the edition of Wagner's prose works translated by W. A. Ellis.

Wagner begins by emphasizing the exalted mission of the monarch. 'In no State,' he writes, 'is there a loftier law than that which centres its

R.T. in Rossini's ball by
recalling Wagner + Ludwig
 Ludwig II of Bavaria

stability in the supreme hereditary power of one particular family . . . in
the person of the King the State attains its true ideal. The role of the
 King, Wagner goes on to say, is essentially a tragic one, since he is called
 upon to strive for such irreconcilable ideals as justice and humanity.
 Because of this it is given to the King, more than to any ordinary citizen,
 'to feel that in Man there dwells an infinitely deeper, more capacious need
 than the State and its ideal can ever satisfy . . . it is Religion alone that can
bear the King to the stricter dignity of manhood.' The 'religious eye',
 Wagner argues, perceives that there must be 'another world' above the
 everyday one with its strife and rivalries. 'For this is the essence of true
Religion: that, away from the cheating show of the day-tide world, it shines
in the night of man's inmost heart, with a light quite other than the world-
sun's light, and visible nowhere save from out of that depth.'

The King, then, stands at the point where State and Religion meet. 'Yet
 an irrecusable urge to turn his back completely on this world must
 necessarily surge up within his breast, were there not for him - as for the
 common man . . . a certain distraction, a periodical turning-aside from
 the world's earnestness which else is ever present in his thoughts.' This
 'certain distraction' is, Wagner says, provided by art, and he continues:
 . . . in conclusion I therefore point my highly-loved young friend to Art,
 as the kindly Life-saviour who does not really and wholly lead us out
 beyond this life, but, within it, lifts us up above it and shews itself as a
 game of play . . . in his most rapt beholding of this . . . there will return to
 him the invincible dream-picture of the holiest revelation.'³

This essay is more than just a general treatise on monarchy, religion
 and art. It was clearly written with Ludwig himself in mind and was
 intended to help him come to terms with his own dilemmas and conflicts
 by giving him a philosophical viewpoint that would bring the contempla-
 tive side of his life into harmony with the requirements of kingship. Wagner
 saw clearly that, without some powerful unifying vision, these two sides
 would drift apart. He also knew that such a vision would involve his own
 work. Inevitably, therefore, Wagner's influence over Ludwig went far
 beyond the field of the arts. There was a mystical bond between them.

Both of them were essentially lonely men, and each was truly understood
 only by the other and by one woman - Ludwig by Elisabeth of Austria and
 Wagner by Cosima von Bülow, the illegitimate daughter of Franz Liszt
 and a French countess. Twenty-four years younger than Wagner, she
 eventually became his wife, but at the time when they first became
 attracted to one another she was married to the conductor and pianist
 Hans von Bülow, Wagner's close friend and collaborator, a brilliant
 musician but a delicately strung, arrogant and temperamental man who
 was to cause Wagner much embarrassment in Munich by his tactless
 partisanship in the Wagnerian cause.

Wagner
 inspired
 by
 D.T.

R.T.
 Andas
 this
 I feel
 him
 as well.

Her happiness
 formula
 for working
 with
 our
 clients
 is
 invincible
 that
 them
 being
 something
 for us
 to know
 to
 improve
 their
 business,

The blossoming love affair between Wagner and Cosima was intensified while Ludwig was away at Kissingen. Wagner had invited the Bülow family to come and stay at the Villa Pellet, but Hans, who was ill, had to delay his visit until 7 July, and Cosima went on with two of her three children, arriving at the villa on 29 June. During the week before Hans's arrival Cosima conceived Wagner's child, Isolde, who was born on 10 April 1865.

Meanwhile Ludwig was basking in the company of the Empress Elisabeth at Kissingen. He also developed a strong admiration for the Tsarina, formerly Princess Marie of Hesse, twenty-one years his senior, who hoped that he would fall in love with her ten-year-old daughter, Alexandrovna. Ludwig toyed with the idea of a future alliance with the girl, but when he broached the subject with his grandfather the old King was unenthusiastic: 'At your age,' he wrote, 'one is far too young for matrimonial life and, considering that you grew up so very quickly, it is doubtful whether a marriage would be good for your health. If you give your promise to marry you deprive yourself of the liberty of seeing other princesses.'⁴ After leaving Kissingen Ludwig had returned briefly to Munich, where Wagner arranged a concert at which Bülow and another pianist, Klindworth, played excerpts from *Tristan und Isolde* and the *Ring*. Then he left for a visit to the Rhine, stopping in Schwalbach for another meeting with the Tsarina. He described the trip in a letter to his old governess, Frau von Leonrod:

'Not until 11 July did I leave Schwalbach where I had gone to see the Empress of Russia again. She is an extremely spirited and likeable woman . . . From Schwalbach I journeyed to the honoured and holy city of Cologne, travelling there by railway from Mainz down the left bank of the majestic Rhine.' No doubt the Rhine music from the *Ring* was still resounding in his mind, adding to the impact of the view from his royal carriage. 'What a wonderful river!' his letter continued. 'What magnificent banks! On either side of this splendid stream rise up imposing mountains which remind one of ancient times. I had with me a book containing legends of the Rhine, and so it was possible for me to transport myself back into the marvels of the Middle Ages. And now the enchanting Cologne! The wonderfully beautiful cathedral with its spires reaching towards the heavens must inspire a feeling of piety in every soul.'⁵

On Ludwig's nineteenth birthday on 25 August Wagner visited him at Hohenschwangau, bringing with him a *March of Homage* which he had written for the occasion. But unfortunately the performance of the march had to be cancelled, owing to the unexpected arrival of the Queen Mother, to whom Wagner was *persona non grata*, and the military band of eighty players, who were staying in readiness at Füssen nearby, had to be sent

D. T.
Comment

back to Munich – the work was finally performed in the courtyard of the Residenz on 5 October.

Soon after his visit to Hohenschwangau, Wagner wrote to Ludwig on 2 September,⁶ describing how he had left the castle feeling reproachful with himself for being in a despondent mood on that occasion and fearing that he might have appeared ungrateful. With such a noble-minded and generous saviour, he added, there was no excuse for him to be faint-hearted, and he was now resolved to apply himself to his task with renewed vigour.

Wagner goes on to say that it has taken him a while to adjust to his new situation, but that he has now gathered himself together and has started to apply his mind to the realization of his work. He continues: 'The difficulties are immense. A single conversation with one of the wretched people who move about like unconscious machines in the ordinary ruts of theatrical and musical routine is often enough to drive me to flight from the world . . .' He looks forward to the projected performance of *The Flying Dutchman* and believes that it will be within the capacities of the Munich performers. But *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* will be another matter. And as for *Tristan*, he shudders at the thought of the difficulties involved – there had already been an unsuccessful attempt to produce the work in Vienna. He proceeds to attack the artistic schools and musical conservatoires. The time has come, he says, to tackle the problem of the unproductiveness of these institutions with their 'pitiful proletariat' of the arts. He realizes, he says, the need to tread carefully in this area in view of the strong bourgeois vested interests that are at stake, but suggests that it would be a good idea to look into the advantages of organizing artistic training along lines specially geared to his new art – a suggestion which was later to turn into his scheme for a new music school in Munich.

Ludwig's reply two days later was enthusiastic, but struck a cautious note:

I grant you that it will be difficult to achieve an improvement in this area; most men of our time, preoccupied as they are with selfish, money-making aims, have a greatly diminished sense of the splendour of true art. I therefore strongly urge you, my dear friend, to proceed with your plan in the manner you propose in your letter, namely with extreme caution.⁷

Wagner and Ludwig were right to be apprehensive about possible resistance from the artistic 'proletariat' and from 'bourgeois vested interests', for whispers against Wagner were already beginning to be heard, whispers which Wagner did not help to quell by the increasingly opulent style in which he lived on the King's money. In the middle of October 1864 he moved into a grand house with a garden in the fashionable Briennerstrasse. Initially it was rented for him, but in May of the following

The Second Lola

year it was bought outright for him by the King. It was situated within a stone's throw of the former home of Lola Montez in the Bärerstrasse, but any prophetic meaning in this escaped Wagner, for when Pfistermeister warned him that his occupation of such a house would attract the envy of the Münchener, Wagner declared that he was no Lola Montez. He would have done well to heed Pfistermeister's warning, for his enemies were soon to dub him 'the Second-Lola', giving him the nickname of 'Lolotte' or 'Lolus'.

Just after moving into the house Wagner signed a contract with the Court Secretary, Julius von Hofmann (who was in charge of the privy purse), the purpose of which was to give him the security he needed for the completion of the *Ring*. The essential terms of this were that a copy of each of the four operas of the cycle was to be delivered to Hofmann within three years, that the work was to be the property of the King, and that Wagner was to receive over the period a total of 30,000 florins.

With an advance of 15,000 florins in his pocket Wagner proceeded to decorate the Briennerstrasse house in a style appropriate to some millionaire's brothel, for in order to function as an artist Wagner needed luxury as some people need alcohol. Sebastian Röckl, in his book *Ludwig II and Richard Wagner* (1913), gives a vivid description of what Wagner called his 'Grail room' with its acres of pink and yellow satin, its Smyrna carpet and its 'soft, springy couch covered with a white flowered moire'.⁸

D.T.'s
Comment

But what began to irritate the Münchener more than Wagner's personal extravagance were the far-reaching innovations that he attempted to make in Munich, with Ludwig's support, in order to accomplish his artistic designs. Wagner had planned a sequence of performances of his works extending over the next nine years, including *Tristan* in May and June 1865 and the *Ring* in August 1867. But two things were necessary for a production of the *Ring*: first, a new type of singer capable of coping with the technical problems posed by the vast work; second, a new opera house embodying a sunken orchestra pit and other improvements which Wagner had long had in mind – the sunken pit is one of the innovations which posterity owes to him.

A corollary of the first requirement was a new school for performers. Wagner outlined his ideas on the school in a *Report to his Majesty King Ludwig II of Bavaria upon a German Music School to be founded in Munich*, a brochure of some fifty pages which he submitted to Ludwig in the early spring of 1865. In it he argued that in both music and drama Germany lacked a style of performance answering to the national spirit. The main objectives of the new school would be to cultivate the right way of rendering the great German music of the past, and in so doing to establish a style that would answer the needs of contemporary German creative artists. As soon as the news of Wagner's scheme became public there was

alarm and resentment in many quarters. The music teachers saw their positions threatened, and performers and theatre-goers alike took offence at the suggestion that Wagnerian opera was all that mattered. Small wonder that the scheme was never realized.

As for the plan for a new theatre, this appears to have been first mooted by Ludwig himself in a letter to Wagner of 26 November 1864, in which he wrote: 'I have decided to have a large stone theatre built, so that the production of the *Ring* may be a perfect one. That incomparable work must be presented in a place worthy of it.'⁹ Wagner decided that the best architect would be his old Dresden friend Gottfried Semper, now professor of architecture at the Zürich Polytechnic. In December Semper came to Munich, held several conversations with the King and was commissioned to proceed. The site chosen was the Gasteig hill, a green height on the eastern bank of the river Isar, near the place where an unobtrusive statue of Ludwig now stands, the only effigy of him in a public place. In the short term, however, a temporary theatre was to be erected in the Glaspalast, the Munich equivalent of London's Crystal Palace, which suffered the same fate as its counterpart, for it was destroyed by fire in June 1931. The whole scheme fizzled out about three years later owing to obstruction from the politicians and Wagner's eventual loss of interest. Meanwhile Semper had devoted much time and energy to the project, producing plans and a model and making frequent visits to Munich. He had been advised by Wagner, for reasons of tact, not to press for a formal contract, and it was not until the beginning of 1869 that, with the help of pressure from a lawyer, he received the money due to him for his work. It is something of a stain on the reputation of both Ludwig and Wagner that, having treated Semper in a rather shabby manner, they chose to be aggrieved by his quite legitimate impatience over his fee.

In January 1865, when nothing seemed to stand in the way of the scheme, Wagner had drawn up a revised timetable for future performances of his works, based on the assumption that the theatre would be ready by the summer of 1867.¹⁰ In the meantime, *Tristan und Isolde* was to be performed that summer in the Residenz Theatre, and the following summer in the same venue performances were to be given of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin* with a repetition of *Tristan*. The timetable continued as follows:

- August 1867. *Ring des Nibelungen* in the newly built festival theatre.
- August 1868. *Ring des Nibelungen* repeated.
- August 1869. Small-scale festival: *Die Meistersinger*, perhaps with the addition of *Tannhäuser* and *Lohengrin*.
- August 1870. *Die Sieger* [a projected opera on Buddhist themes which was never written] together with *Die Meistersinger*.
- August 1871. *Tristan und Isolde*. *Sieger*. *Meistersinger*.

The Second Lola

August 1872. *Parzival*, with repetitions.

August 1873. *Ring des Nibelungen*. Preceded by *Tannhäuser*, *Lohengrin*, *Tristan*.
Followed by: *Meistersinger*, *Sieger*, *Parzival*.

In the event the only part of this timetable to be realized on schedule was the 1865 performance of *Tristan*.

It is an interesting thought that if things had turned out slightly differently Munich rather than Bayreuth would have become the Mecca of the Wagner cult. Alterations to the city were to have included a magnificent new street forming a triumphal way from the Residenz down to the Isar and across a splendid new bridge to the theatre. In retrospect, however, Wagner must have been glad that he chose Bayreuth, for that small town came to be dominated by the Wagner establishment in a way that Munich never could have been. Even Ludwig himself never worshipped Wagner to the exclusion of all other art, and he intended the festival theatre and the music school to be merely part of a general refinement and elevation of the cultural life of Munich. Writing to Wagner on 8 November, 1864, he declared:

My intention is to bring before the Munich public such serious and significant works as those of Shakespeare, Calderón, Goethe, Schiller, Beethoven, Mozart, Gluck, Weber. In doing so I wish to raise audiences to a higher, more concentrated mood and gradually to wean them of the more vulgar, frivolous type of performance.¹¹

With his voracious appetite for reading, Ludwig had devoured the works of most of the great dramatists of the past, and now he wanted the public to share the sense of elevation that he had gained from those works. He also appreciated certain modern playwrights, such as Ibsen. If he had been able to accomplish his cultural mission, or even to go on believing that it could be accomplished, his life would have had a meaning and purpose that could perhaps have averted the progressive alienation from the world that led to his untimely end. With Wagner at his side it was easier for him to believe in himself and his mission, but when Wagner was eventually chased out of Munich at the end of 1865 one of the foundation stones of his existence was removed. As Ernest Newman has written in his *Life of Richard Wagner*: 'Had Wagner been permitted by Fate to spend the remainder of his life in Munich, the King's personal destiny for certain, and possibly the political history of Bavaria, would have been different from what they subsequently were.'¹²

The opposition to Wagner and the frustration of the plans for the music school and the festival theatre can be put down to a number of factors, but basically it was a case of a conflict between two incompatible views of the world. The common dream of Ludwig and Wagner constituted a soaring artistic and philosophical conception that would recognize no values but

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its own. Against this was set the conservatism of a traditionally-minded public and the interests of a cynical and opportunistic group of courtiers, politicians and journalists. In order to understand the battle that was being played out between Wagner and his opponents it is necessary to know how the court and government operated in Munich at that time.

In Bavaria a rather unusual system existed whereby the King communicated with his government ministers not directly but through what was called the 'Cabinet Secretariat', a group of close advisers and aides who wielded considerable power and influence. What in most English-speaking countries would be called the 'Cabinet' (governing by mandate from the electorate) was in Bavaria known as the 'Council of Ministers'. The institution of the Cabinet Secretariat as it then stood dated back to the reign of Ludwig I who, under the pressure of his duties and preoccupied as he was with the rebuilding of Munich, decided to create a new level of officials. The result was a curious anomaly: a group of officials who were in a sense part of the private staff of the monarch and in another sense an extension of the government. In effect this group constituted a shadowy authority in some ways more powerful than the Council of Ministers itself, and the post of Cabinet Secretary was therefore a crucial one. The existence of such a system made it easier for Ludwig to turn his back on affairs of state and so exacerbated the problem which was to grow increasingly acute throughout his reign.

To make things more complicated, the King had another set of officials called the Court Secretariat. Whereas the Cabinet Secretariat dealt mostly with questions of state, the Court Secretariat administered the privy purse and concerned itself with the King's theatrical and architectural projects and other such matters. As the royal treasurer, the Court Secretary was a key official, and Ludwig came to regard the holder of this post as more important than his Cabinet Secretary.

Who were the personalities who inhabited this labyrinth of power? I have already mentioned the Cabinet Secretary Pfistermeister and the Court Secretary Hofmann. Another key member of the staff was the wily Assistant Cabinet Secretary, Johann von Lutz, who was to play a fateful role in Ludwig's life. In addition there was a host of other official and semi-official courtiers such as the 'reader', Leinfelder, and Count von Holnstein (1835-95), a sinister figure who will also play an important part in this story. Holnstein was *Oberststallmeister* (Chief Master of the Horse) from 1866, a more important position than might be supposed since horses were a key element in the life of the court, and the *Oberststallmeister* was in frequent contact with the King and could use his position to influence matters outside of the stable. It must also be remembered that Ludwig was particularly interested in horses and was a stunningly good rider. On his accession to the throne one of the first things

he did was to order a list of all the riding horses of the royal stable so that he could try them out one by one. Böhm describes Holnstein as 'a man of true Bavarian type and manners, powerful and intelligent enough to accomplish just about anything he wanted'.¹³ In the large retinue of 119 people who accompanied the King on his journeys, Holnstein evidently played a key role, being responsible not only for the horses but for other transport arrangements as well. These then were some of the members of Ludwig's personal and Cabinet staff.

As regards the government, the figure who concerns us most at present is Baron Ludwig von der Pfordten (1811–80) whom Ludwig made Foreign Minister and Head of the Council of Ministers (Prime Minister) in December 1864 – the two posts traditionally went together in Bavaria. Pfordten had already served under King Max II from 1849 to 1859. A Bavarian by birth, he had been Professor of Roman Law at Leipzig and, having entered politics, was made Minister for Education in 1848 by King Friedrich August II of Saxony. In May of that year Wagner had tried unsuccessfully to interest Pfordten in a plan to set up a German national theatre in Saxony. Pfordten remembered Wagner with particular distaste for his part in the Dresden uprising of 1849. In fact he was a bitter enemy of Wagner to the end of his life. Everything about Wagner – his music, his political ideas, his personality – was repugnant to Pfordten, and in 1858 he had told the actor Emil Devrient that 'if the princes would only hold together as the democrats do, Wagner's music would not be given anywhere'.¹⁴ He had tried to persuade King Max II not to allow *Tannhäuser* to be performed in Munich, something for which Ludwig had evidently never forgiven him. The young King also disliked Pfordten's professorial habit of lecturing him as though he were a student. Nevertheless, Pfordten was at the time the only practical choice as Prime Minister, and Ludwig bowed to necessity. With such a bitter enemy at the head of the government Wagner would have to watch his step carefully – something that did not come naturally to him.

Another important faction in the fracas surrounding Wagner was the Bavarian press, which was immensely influential and for the most part unscrupulous in its use of power. For example the liberal *Allgemeine Zeitung*, published in Augsburg, played a part in frustrating the plans for the festival theatre by denying that such a scheme was being contemplated, when its editors must have known full well that the King had given it his full backing. During Wagner's stay in Munich the press became increasingly vociferous and savage in its hostility towards him, and played a decisive part in his downfall.

It would be wrong, however, to see Wagner and his supporters as the totally innocent victims of a witch-hunt. They themselves were also partly to blame for what happened, on account of the arrogance and indiscretion

of which they were frequently guilty. One example is the notorious remark made by Hans von Bülow while he was conducting rehearsals for the *Tristan* production in May 1865. Bülow wanted the orchestral area to be enlarged, and when the theatre machinist told him that this would mean sacrificing thirty seats in the stalls Bülow snapped out: 'What does it matter whether we have thirty *Schweinehunde* [curs] more or less in the place?'¹⁵ This remark was reported in the *Neueste Nachrichten* five days later, and in the same journal Bülow subsequently published an apology which was courteously accepted by the newspaper. The episode was, however, never forgotten by the enemies of Wagner and Bülow, and it was eagerly seized upon by other newspapers. The *Volksblatt* declared that if Bülow had made such a remark in the Hofbräuhaus, being torn in pieces would be the least thing that would happen to him. The *Neuer Bayerischer Kurier* printed every day for a week the headline: 'Hans Bülow is still here!' And the satirical journal *Punsch* (the Bavarian equivalent of the English *Punch*) published a cartoon showing an audience of howling dogs which was captioned: 'Three rows for Bülow in the stalls.'¹⁶

As for Wagner himself, there was at first little hostility towards him. The politicians waited and watched to see what would happen, and the press confined itself initially to satirical but good-natured barbs. But as Wagner's relationship with the King grew closer, as his demands on the royal purse rose, and as his love affair with Cosima became an increasingly popular subject for malicious gossip, opposition mounted on all sides. The politicians were alarmed at Wagner's influence and financial extravagance. And the most conservative elements among the Munich population were scandalized that this libertine Protestant with his revolutionary views should have such an apparent hold over their young King. The press, for its part, began to exploit eagerly any opportunity to attack Wagner and was particularly quick to seize upon any signs of a rift between the King and his favourite.

The first such rift occurred in February 1865 and arose over a misunderstanding. The King had presented Wagner with a portrait of himself in oils and had said that he would like to commission one of Wagner from the painter Joseph Bernhardt. Wagner, however, thought it would be better to choose an artist who knew him better, and accordingly he arranged to sit for Friedrich Pecht. The King was delighted with the resulting portrait and sent his heartfelt thanks. When Pfistermeister raised the matter of payment with Wagner, the latter assumed that the change of artist had not altered the King's intention to pay for the picture and he told Pfistermeister to settle the matter with Pecht on the basis of whatever fee had been proposed for Bernhardt. When he learned that Ludwig now preferred to look upon the portrait as a gift from the sitter, Wagner arranged to pay Pecht himself and in due

course sent him 500 gulden (of which Pecht graciously returned 100). Meanwhile, however, Pfistermeister had, it seems, mischievously told the King that Wagner was demanding 1,000 gulden for the portrait, and shortly afterwards he or someone else at the court had leaked to the press the story that the King was exceedingly displeased over the affair. Soon the newspapers were full of reports that Wagner was in disgrace. The town already knew that Ludwig had not attended a performance of *The Flying Dutchman* on 5 February, and it was assumed that this was a sign of his displeasure, when the truth of the matter was that after a performance of the *Dutchman* the previous December, with which Wagner had not been satisfied, it had been agreed that, until a model *Tristan* performance could be given in the summer of 1865, the King would not attend any more Wagner operas. But there is no smoke without fire, and it does appear that for a few days Ludwig was annoyed with Wagner, to the extent of refusing him an audience on 6 February. It is possible, however, that this displeasure was due less to the incident of the portrait than to a minor indiscretion on Wagner's part when, in conversation with Pfistermeister, he had referred to the King as 'Mein Junge' (my boy). In any event, relations were quickly repaired, and Wagner was soon communicating with Ludwig as before. Whatever the cause of the temporary disfavour, it seems that Pfistermeister, whom Wagner still wrongly imagined to be his ally, had deliberately stirred up the trouble. Such upsets continued to occur from time to time in the relationship between Ludwig and Wagner, but they never disturbed the basic affinity which the two men felt for one another.

It is important to be clear about the exact nature of Wagner's influence over Ludwig. Some writers would have it that Wagner was a wily opportunist who, having gained a hold over Ludwig through art, then proceeded to exploit his patron for his own political ends. Others would maintain that Wagner was scrupulously selfless all along in his dealings with the King and never abused his position. The truth lies between the two extremes. Wagner certainly did not 'exploit' Ludwig in the way that many people have imagined. Ludwig was not the sort of man to allow himself to be exploited. He had a proud sense of himself and his office and was quick to resent any infringement of his dignity and independence. Furthermore, his political judgement was shrewd and he was perfectly capable of resisting any attempts to sway it, even when they came from Wagner. In fact Wagner himself confessed to a friend that, whenever he started talking about politics in their conversations, Ludwig would look up at the ceiling and begin to whistle softly to himself. This is not to say that Wagner had no influence over Ludwig. On the contrary, he had a strong influence which extended not only to music but on occasions to politics as well – Ludwig's whistling notwithstanding. But this influence

came largely from their shared ideals. I believe that Newman describes their relationship correctly when he writes:

The simplest reading of the situation . . . would seem to be this – that even as a boy Ludwig had had a romantic vision of himself, as King, leading the German people along ideal paths, and that the Wagner writings simply happened to strike into that vision at the critical time and with tremendous impact.¹⁷

Wagner, for his part, came to Munich primarily with the intention of furthering his art and creating for himself the sort of life which enabled him to do that. In the beginning he had little desire to meddle in politics, but when he found that the plans which he and Ludwig had laid were being thwarted by obstructive politicians and officials he was drawn willy-nilly into political intrigue. Furthermore, he had become increasingly aware of the vulnerability of the young King. He knew that such purity, innocence and lofty idealism were not the best qualities to withstand the cynical machinations of those who surrounded him. Wagner, in fact, came to feel protective towards Ludwig in a special way. And here we enter an important area in this whole story – an area which, for want of a better word, I shall describe as 'occult'.

On the evening of 22 February 1865 an old woman named Frau Dangel, an astrologer and soothsayer, called on Wagner. He later described the event to his friend Julius Fröbel, who gave the following account of it in his diary. 'Wagner,' he wrote,

is imbued with the belief that his relationship with the King, which seems to be a fairly familiar one, places great and high responsibilities on him. In this he is right. But he takes the matter in a quite poetic, almost theatrical way. He told me about the remarkable occurrence involving a mysterious old woman from the Munich populace who came to him one evening and said that she must speak with him about the young King and his destiny. She had already advised Ludwig I and Max II, but they had not heeded her . . . 'Do you believe in the stars?' the old woman asked Wagner in a loud and ceremonious tone. 'In the stars it is written that this young King is called to great deeds. I want my King to have peace, and you, Herr Wagner, must guard him against the misfortunes through which evil men seek to ruin him as they ruined his father and grandfather.' Wagner got into the most excited mood while he was telling me about this event, which appears to have made a deep impression on him.¹⁸

Fröbel's conclusion is confirmed by the letter that Wagner wrote the day after the incident to Mathilde Maier: 'The fate of this wonderful, unique youth, who is profoundly linked with me by a mystical magic, is entrusted to me, me . . . The profound meaning of my duty to the King, which is of significance to a whole people, nay to Germany itself, has been revealed to me by an almost supernatural experience.'¹⁹

The mystical nature of the bond that Wagner felt to exist between

The Second Lola

himself and Ludwig is also hinted at in his *Brown Book*, a sort of journal of personal reflections which was never intended for eyes other than his own and Cosima's. In August 1865 he was alone in the mountains, Cosima having gone with Bülow to Budapest, and was feeling lonely and unhappy. 'Oh heaven!' he wrote in his *Brown Book*, 'which of us understands the being by his very side? What do our dearest friends know of us? Unless it [knowledge and understanding] comes from the stars, as with Parzival [his name for Ludwig], no one can learn out of himself who the other is.'²⁰ And a few days later, reflecting on the divine imperative which he detected in Ludwig, he wrote: 'Only one man have I ever come upon with this divine "must" in his soul – Parzival, my son in the Holy Spirit.'²¹

At that time Wagner had not yet written *Parsifal* (the title of the opera was spelt with 's' and 'f' rather than 'z' and 'v'), which was to be his final work, and some would say his greatest. But he had been carrying the idea around with him for many years. He had read deeply in the literature connected with the Parzival legend, notably Wolfram von Eschenbach's powerful thirteenth-century version of the story, and he had written *Lohengrin* partly as a sort of preparation for the later opera. He must have felt in his heart that *Parsifal* was to be the culmination of his life's work and would contain the purest essence of his art and beliefs. For this reason he allowed the work to mature slowly in his mind over the years and to become part of his being. When he met Ludwig he must have been struck by the similarities between the young King and the figure of Parzival, the 'Pure Fool' (*der reine Tor*, that is, one whose simplicity enables him to attain great goodness and wisdom). Both were strong, brave and handsome, and both were curiously naive and innocent. But, most important of all, both were 'called', as the astrologer Frau Dengl put it, to a high destiny. In the Parzival story the hero is destined by birth to succeed to the Grail kingship, and his footsteps are guided by divine impulse until he finally asks the right question concerning the wound of the 'Fisher King' Amfortas, the previous keeper of the Grail. By asking Amfortas the nature of the wound from which he suffers, Parzival lays claim to the Grail and removes the curse which had kept Amfortas's wound festering and made his kingdom a waste land.

Just as Parzival obeyed the dictates of his God-given birthright, so Ludwig – as Wagner saw it – obeyed the divine "must" in his soul. Thus when Wagner called Ludwig 'my Parzival' it was more than just a nickname. And when he described the King as 'my son in the Holy Spirit', he meant that in Ludwig he had found someone who would be the real embodiment of all the ideals that he had projected into the figure of Parzival – someone who would be able to fulfil his hopes for the regeneration of the waste land of Germany through art. That Ludwig

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accepted this view of himself is suggested by the fact that in several of his letters to Wagner he refers to himself as Parsival.

Wagner had some years earlier set down his thoughts on the destiny of Germany, and its relationship to the story of the Nibelung Hoard and other myths, in a remarkable essay entitled *The Wibelungen*. The name, Wagner says, is cognate with 'Nibelungen' and refers to the blood-line of the Frankish kings who, he claims, are the true inheritors of the 'Hoard', by which he appears to mean the possession of supreme worldly power – a power which rightfully belongs to a master-race who came from the east and were descended from what he calls an *Urvater* or 'Original Father', an idea which, according to Wagner, became amalgamated with the story of Christ. All this is more fantasy than historical fact, but Wagner argues the case with eloquence. In a revealing passage he imagines the Emperor Frederick Barbarossa speaking the following words:

In the German Folk survives the oldest lawful race of Kings in all the world: it issues from a son of God, called by his nearest kinsmen Siegfried, but *Christ* by the remaining nations of the earth; for the welfare of his race, and the peoples of the earth derived therefrom, he wrought a deed most glorious, and for that deed's sake suffered death. The nearest heirs of his great deed, and of the power won thereby, are the 'Nibelungen', to whom the earth belongs in name and for the happiness of every nation. The Germans are the oldest nation, their blue-blood King is a 'Nibelung', and at their head he claims world-rulership . . . Thus too the Kaiser delegates high-priestly power, originally no less pertaining to him than the earthly might, to the Pope of Rome: the latter has to exercise the Sight-of-God in his name, and to acquaint him with the God's-decree, that he may execute the Heavenly Will in the name of God upon the earth.²²

After a time, Wagner says, Frederick turned his gaze eastwards.

A force resistless drew him on toward Asia, to the cradle of the nations, to the place where God begat the father of all Men. Wondrous legends had he heard of a lordly country deep in Asia, in farthest India, of an ur-divine Priest-King who governed there a pure and happy people, immortal through the nature of a wonder-working relic called '*The Holy Grail*'.²³

Frederick was killed while crusading in the Holy Land, but the legend of the Grail took hold and replaced the Hoard as the object of the great quest. Wagner goes on:

Since then, the legend went that once the *Keeper of the Grail* had really brought the holy relic to the Occident; great wonders had he here performed: in the Netherlands, the Nibelungen's ancient seat, a Knight of the Grail had appeared, but vanished when asked forbidden tidings of his origin; – then was the Grail conducted back by its old guardian to the distant morning-land; – in a castle on a lofty mount in India it now was kept once more . . . The spiritual ascension of the Hoard into the Grail was accomplished in the German conscience, and the Grail,

The Second Lola

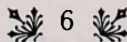
at least in the meaning lent it by German poets, must rank as the ideal representative or follower of the Nibelungen-Hoard; it, too, had sprung from Asia, from the ur-home of mankind; God had guided it to men as paragon of holiness.

It is of the first importance that its keeper was priest and king alike, that is, a Master (*Oberhaupt*) of all Spiritual Knighthood, such as was introduced from the Orient in the twelfth century.²⁴

It must be remembered that Ludwig had eagerly read all of Wagner's published works and must have thoroughly absorbed the ideas put forward in *The Wibelungen*. Much that happened later in his life is explained in terms of this mythology.

Notes - Wagner.
From "The Swan King"

2 pages



Ludwig H

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting



The year 1865 was to be one of the most glorious and also one of the saddest in the lives of both Ludwig and Wagner. It opened full of promise, with plans taking shape for a première of *Tristan and Isolde*, to be held in Munich in the spring. An attempt had already been made to stage this opera in Vienna, but nothing had come of it, mainly because of the lack of a suitable heroic tenor to play the highly demanding role of Tristan. By 1865, however, such a singer had emerged. He was the twenty-nine-year-old Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld, a member of the Dresden opera company. Schnorr was a man whose physical weight and girth were as imposing as his voice, and this had at first prejudiced Wagner against him, but when the composer heard Schnorr perform he was completely won over. The young tenor could both sing and act with great power and sensitivity, and he brought to his Wagnerian performances a deep and intelligent appreciation of the composer's intentions. Furthermore he was a man of genial temperament, singularly lacking in egocentricity and greatly devoted to Wagner and his ideals. In short, he was worth his considerable weight in gold to Wagner. His wife Malvina, some ten years older than her husband, was also a fine singer and was well suited to the part of Isolde.

At the end of February the pair came to Munich for discussions with Wagner, and a test rehearsal was held, as well as a performance of *Tannhäuser* with Schnorr in the title role. Both the King and Wagner were enchanted by Schnorr's singing, and it was arranged with the King of Saxony for the couple to have leave of absence from Dresden for the months of April, May and June. The first performance of *Tristan* was accordingly planned for the middle of May.

After returning briefly to Dresden, Schnorr and Malvina arrived back in Munich on 5 April, and rehearsals began. By a strangely appropriate coincidence, on the day of the first rehearsal, Cosima von Bülow gave birth to Wagner's daughter, Isolde. Her second name, Ludowika, was chosen in honour of the King.

The first performance was fixed for 15 May, and as the day approached Wagner's friends and followers came to Munich from all parts of Europe.

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting

The King was beside himself with excitement. On 10 May he wrote to Wagner: 'The joy of my heart gives me no rest: I must write to you. Nearer and nearer draws the blessed day: "Tristan will arise!" . . . Beloved I shall never abandon you! - Oh, "Tristan", "Tristan" is coming to me. The dreams of my boyhood are to be fulfilled!'¹

On the 11th a full dress rehearsal of *Tristan* was held before the King and about 600 invited guests. To mark the occasion Ludwig granted an amnesty to those who had been condemned for taking part in the revolution of 1848-9, thereby symbolically removing any guilt that might still have clung to Wagner as a former revolutionary. On the 13th an extra and final rehearsal was held, with no audience.

On the 15th, the day scheduled for the première, disaster struck. First came a bad omen for Wagner when in the morning the bailiffs invaded his house and he had to send Cosima to the Court Secretary, Hofmann, with an urgent appeal for 2,400 florins. Then, while Wagner was still recovering from this humiliating experience, Schnorr arrived at the house and tearfully announced that the evening's performance would have to be postponed as Malvina's voice had suddenly become hoarse, the result of taking a steam bath.

That afternoon the postponement was announced, and soon Munich was buzzing with extraordinary rumours about the reasons. Some said that Wagner's appalling music had ruined Malvina's voice. Others declared that Bülow had got wind of a plot to assassinate him. Another theory was that the whole orchestra had gone on strike for more pay. Wagner's enemies in the press gloated boorishly over the disaster, and a small local theatre put on a parody of the opera under the title of *Tristanderl und Süßholde*.

But the set-back, however painful, was only temporary. The Schnorrs went off to the spa town of Bad Reichenhall near the Austrian border to recover, returning to Munich on 6 June. Three final rehearsals were held, and on 10 June, six years after its completion, *Tristan* was finally brought before the public.

It must have been an electrifying occasion. The performance was due to begin at six o'clock, and by ten past, tension was mounting. The audience included ex-King Ludwig I, the King's uncles Luitpold and Adalbert, and Duke Max and his family. Suddenly the young King appeared, dressed in civilian clothes but looking as striking as ever, and took his seat in the royal box. This was the signal for the haggard, quixotic figure of Bülow to raise his baton before the dimly-lit orchestra and signal the beginning of the prelude. For the next five hours the audience sat entranced. After each act there was thunderous applause, drowning a small amount of hissing. When the performance ended, Wagner and the Schnorrs appeared on the stage to take a triumphant bow. 'We are all in a dream-state over the

*P 60
if the death
of Schnorr*

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting

How my soul longs and thirsts for such works as can re-create those spirits for us . . .⁵

Here again we catch a glimpse of those mythical driving forces that were so important in Ludwig's life. His namesake Ludwig the Bavarian became Holy Roman Emperor in 1328 and was a figure much admired by Ludwig II. As the above letter shows, it was easy for Ludwig to see this earlier Wittelsbach as a kind of Grail King, merging with the figures of Parzival and Lohengrin. In some way he saw himself carrying on this role, perhaps by virtue of some mystical power of the Wittelsbach blood-line, perhaps even through reincarnation. It is significant that two of the men Ludwig admired were both namesakes: Ludwig the Bavarian and Louis XIV of France. The fact that they bore his name might have been to him a divine sign that he and they were really the same individual in different flesh and separated by time. It is also significant that Ludwig linked his two namesakes in another way. The name of the Ettal valley in southern Bavaria, with its 'Grail Temple' attributed to Ludwig the Bavarian, reappeared in Ludwig's code name for one of his castles, Meicost Ettal, an anagram of Louis XIV's famous utterance: *L'état, c'est Moi*.

It would not be surprising if Ludwig believed in reincarnation, as we know that Wagner did so. It is true that Wagner's correspondence with Ludwig rarely touches on such subjects, and during the summer of 1865 his letters to the King were mostly occupied with increasingly vehement attacks on Pfistermeister, advice about political appointments and complaints about how their joint plans were being frustrated by officials. But occasionally he says something more revealing of his profound thoughts. His letter to Ludwig dated 8 August 1865 contains a curious little preface, set apart from the rest of the letter, in which he addresses Ludwig by the intimate pronoun 'Du' before returning to the formal 'Sie', which he normally used, in the main text of the letter. This preface contains the following passage:

. . . The most beautiful and profound popular myths and the teachings are being lived through by me; and the noble belief in reincarnation is becoming a deeply felt truth. I perceive clearly how I have lived several lives, in myself, in You, in Her, in all those I love; and living thus within them I experience the joys of death, of release, of ceasing to exist. What is this perplexing mystery? It is the mystery of a love that no longer craves but only wants to give, give itself and thus release itself.

Beautiful soul, in whom I live when I have utterly lost myself, how I love myself when I see myself in you . . . in me the one who has departed lives on, and with him I live in you! The chain is extended, not broken!⁶

Wagner must have come into contact with the doctrine of reincarnation through his deep reading in oriental mystical literature. He was profoundly

interested in Buddhism and planned to write an opera on Buddhist themes which was to be called *Die Sieger* (The Victors). This project in fact never came to fruition, but Ludwig frequently expressed eagerness to see it finished. For most of his life he was fascinated by the Orient, probably for reasons that went deeper than mere romanticism. He asked to be told of progress on *Die Sieger* in a letter to Wagner on 21 August 1865. He began by expressing disappointment that an impending visit of the King of Prussia would prevent him from celebrating his twentieth birthday in the company of Wagner, then the letter continued:

... I long for you. Only when I think of my dear one and his work am I truly happy. How are things with you just now, up there in the joyful wooded heights? ... Dear One, please grant me a request! I beg of you. Tell me something of your plans for 'Die Sieger' and 'Parcival'! I am yearning to hear. Please quench this burning thirst! Oh how null is the world! How wretched and vulgar so many men! Their lives revolve in the narrow circle of everyday banality. Oh, if only I had the world behind me!⁷

Did Ludwig perhaps long for annihilation in the belief that he would be reborn into a better, less vulgar world? At any rate, as long as he remained in this world he longed for messages that whispered to him that his life had a meaning beyond the obvious and banal things that being a king meant, messages that came to him when he listened to the words and music of *Lohengrin*, when he glimpsed the 'Grail Temple' in the Ettal valley or when he read about the court of Louis XIV.

After receiving Ludwig's letter of 21 August, Wagner wrote in his *Brown Book* on 26 August: 'How wonderful! The King asks longingly to hear *Parzival*.'⁸ And the following day on the next page of the book he began writing the draft of the libretto for the opera – an example of the way in which Ludwig's enthusiasm stimulated his creative powers.

As a twentieth birthday present Wagner sent Ludwig a hand-written, finished copy of *Rheingold*, eliciting an ecstatic letter of thanks. Cosima also sent him a present: a cushion embroidered by her own hand. In her accompanying letter she explained that the embroidery depicted 'the symbols of the exalted works' which Ludwig had made his own by his generous patronage. The images were those of 'the Dutchman's ship, Tannhäuser's staff, Lohengrin's swan, Siegfried's sword and Tristan's cup ... all on the green ground of hope'.⁹ Each stitch, she wrote, contained a blessing. Ludwig sent her a warm letter of thanks, assuring her that he would always hold her gift in high honour.

He was even more pleased when Cosima sent him in October a collection of Wagner's writings from his Paris period, copied out in her own hand and put together under the title of the *Wagner Book*. He sent her in return a sapphire, 'the colour of Faith – a symbol of the firm faith and

unshakeable confidence that inspire me and give me heart to do all that it lies in me to do in order to help build the great, the ETERNAL work'.¹⁰

As Ludwig's inner life grew more intense his enthusiasm for the conventional role of king waned. And this did not go unnoticed by the public and the court. In September, for example, he offended his generals by refusing their pressing invitations to attend army manoeuvres, causing the following comment in a secret report by the Munich Police Directorate: 'If the King is able to ride for 8-10 hours by night and in fog without endangering his health he should be able to devote a few days to his army.'¹¹ On 4 September he was absent when his father's coffin was transferred to the church of the Theatines, and in October he offended his grandfather, the ex-King, by refusing an invitation to a family gathering on the 18th on the excuse that he had rheumatism, which did not, however, prevent him from going to the theatre the same evening to see a performance of Schiller's *William Tell*. Already his passion for the theatre had become a subject of comment. A special train conveyed him from Berg castle to Munich and back again for his theatrical evenings, and often his ministers had to confer with him at the door of his box during the intervals.

After the *William Tell* performance Ludwig decided to see for himself the country for which Tell had fought. Ludwig's abiding passion for Switzerland, the land of democracy *par excellence*, might seem at first sight paradoxical for a traditionally-minded King. But Ludwig's concept of kingship was a rather special one and was influenced, as I have already said, by Wagner's theories on the subject. What appealed to Wagner, and to Ludwig, was the idea of a monarch or leader in whom power was vested by virtue of the trust placed in him by the people. He was the expression of their collective will, the heroic embodiment of all the accumulated ideals and aspirations of his folk. Whether the leader is chosen because of his blood or for some other reason is not important. What matters is the deeply felt, mystical bond between himself and his people. It was this principle which Ludwig saw at work in the story of Tell, and he admired the bond of confidence which existed between Tell and the people he represented. This was why Ludwig had little use either for politicians of the progressive, liberal kind, or for those of the conservative, monarchist persuasion. Both interposed themselves between the King and his people and interfered with his almost priestly function as leader and hero.

Travelling incognito and with a small retinue, Ludwig arrived in Lucerne on 20 October and booked in at the Hotel Schweizerhof, where he was given the only three rooms available, on the fourth floor. Later, when it was discovered who he was, the proprietor offered to have the best suite vacated for him. Ludwig, however, good-humouredly declined. Later he moved to the more rustic environs of the Gasthaus Rössli at Brunnen,

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting

with their conductor, Siebenkäs, were posted on the castle turrets. And, as the sun rose over the mountains, they played a series of tunes from *Lohengrin*, the oboes answering each other across the battlements. On the 13th Ludwig and Wagner made an excursion into the Tyrol, and the following day Ludwig sent an enraptured letter to Cosima:

... Let us two take a solemn vow to do all it is in human power to do to preserve for Wagner the peace he has won, to banish care from him, to take upon ourselves, whenever possible, every grief of his, to love him, love him with all the strength that God has put into the human soul! ... O, he is godlike, godlike! My mission is to live for him, to suffer for him, if that be necessary for his full salvation...¹⁵

It is a measure of Ludwig's innocence of mind that at this time he had no idea of the true nature of the relationship between Wagner and Cosima.

After Wagner left Hohenschwangau, Ludwig prolonged his Wagnerian mood by arranging a kind of *son et lumière* on the nearby lake, the Alpsee, in which Paul Taxis, dressed as Lohengrin, was drawn across the water in a boat pulled by an artificial swan. The scene was floodlit and was accompanied by a band playing the appropriate passages from the opera. Ludwig was so enchanted that he ordered a second performance the following evening. All his life Ludwig sought to create moments of this kind, moments when his inner world sprang into sharp reality. It is easy to make fun of such performances, but anyone who knows the Alpsee and has seen *Lohengrin* will realize that this piece of make-believe must have been an electrifying experience for those who witnessed it. In later years Ludwig himself used to dress up as Lohengrin, and after his death a costume of the swan-knight was found among his possessions.

Wagner, now feeling renewed confidence in his relationship with the King, returned to his role of political mentor, once more urging Ludwig to appoint a Special Secretary to carry out royal intentions in artistic matters. His other proposals included a new musical journal to supplement the work of his projected new School of Music, and a new political-cum-artistic journal, with Wagner's friend Julius Fröbel as editor. The post of Special Secretary should, Wagner suggested, go to Emil Riedel (later Bavarian Finance Minister). Riedel declined the post, partly because he did not feel sufficiently familiar with the ways of the court and partly because he wished to devote himself to social questions. But when Pfistermeister heard of these proposals he was alarmed, realizing that Wagner was intriguing to have him removed or to curtail his powers. Furthermore Fröbel was *persona non grata* to Pfistermeister and his associates because his political views did not coincide with theirs.

There now existed in Bavarian political circles a faction which looked towards Prussia as the future leader of Germany. Lutz was a member of

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting

which played right into the hands of his enemies. In an anonymous, but unmistakably Wagnerian article in the Munich *Neueste Nachrichten* of 29 November, he lashed out at the Pfistermeister clique. These people, he wrote, 'whom I have no need to mention by name since they are the objects of universal and contemptuous indignation in Bavaria' are reduced, in order to save themselves, to representing 'the King's unshakeable friendship for Wagner' as a danger to the throne. He continued:

Of one thing you can be quite certain: it is in no way a question of any principle, any party position, being attacked by Wagner: it is purely and simply an affair of the lowest personal interests, and that on the part of a very small number of individuals: and I venture to assure you that with the removal of two or three persons who do not enjoy the smallest respect among the Bavarian people, both the King and the Bavarian people would once and for all be set free from these annoyances.²⁰

The last statement of course demonstrated exactly what the *Volksbote* article had maintained, namely that Wagner was eager for the removal of his enemies in the Cabinet. What was more, Wagner compounded his error by pretending to Ludwig that he had not written the article.

Meanwhile, before the appearance of his foolhardy article, Wagner had written to the King sending him a copy of the *Volksbote* article along with an exasperated letter asking Ludwig to promise that no further order relating to their plans should pass through either the Cabinet or the Court Theatre until changes had been made in the staff of those institutions. He also urged the King to form a new Cabinet and to recall as its head Max von Neumayr, formerly Minister of the Interior, who had resigned following riots in Munich in October. Ludwig's reply showed once again that he was capable of being very objective when it came to political advice from Wagner:

Rest assured, my dear one, that what I am now saying is not the outcome of a momentary superficial emotion . . . No, I am replying to you calmly and after due consideration. I had the best of reasons for dismissing Neumayr and retracting the confidence I had so long reposed in him, and withdrawing my royal favour. It would therefore be quite inconsequent of me were I now to entrust this man – with whom, I repeat, I have every reason to be dissatisfied, – with the formation of a new Cabinet. Pfistermeister is insignificant and stupid; of that there can be no question. I will not let him remain much longer in the Cabinet; but to dismiss him and the other members of it at the present moment does not seem to me to be advisable: the time for that is not yet. I say this most positively. Believe me, I have my own good grounds for saying it.²¹

He went on to advise Wagner not to pay so much attention to 'press tittle-tattle'. Little did he know what an avalanche had already been set in motion. Two days later Wagner's anonymous article appeared. Ludwig

was aghast. No doubt he realized its authorship, and for the first time his idealistic vision of Wagner must have taken a dent. But tactfully he did not reveal that he had seen through the deception when he wrote to Wagner on 3 December. 'That article in the *Neueste Nachrichten*,' he said, 'has contributed not a little to embitter the last days of my sojourn here [at Hohenschwangau]. It was unquestionably written by one of your friends who thought he was doing you a service thereby; unfortunately, so far from helping you, it has injured you.'²²

Interestingly, even at this stage there was still considerable support for Wagner among the Munich public, and on 1 December he was given a standing ovation when he attended a performance of the Sailors' Chorus from *The Flying Dutchman*. But his enemies in the government, court and church had now scented blood and were in full cry. Pfordten wrote to Ludwig on 1 December telling the King of the considerable resentment against Wagner that now existed in Munich, aroused by the *Nachrichten* article, by the colossal sum of 40,000 florins which had been granted to Wagner in October and by Wagner's general interference in matters unrelated to art. He went on: 'Your Majesty now stands at a fateful parting of the ways: you have to choose between the love and respect of your faithful people and the "friendship" of Richard Wagner.'²³

By the time Ludwig returned to Munich on 6 December he had come to realize the full gravity of the situation. Back in the Residenz, he immediately asked for reports on the state of public opinion. Then he came to what must have been one of the most painful decisions of his life. 'My dear Minister,' he wrote to Pfordten on 7 December, 'my resolution stands firm. R. Wagner must leave Bavaria. I will show my dear people that its love and confidence are the first things of all to me. You will realize that this has not been easy for me; but I have overcome.'

Meanwhile the decision had been communicated to Wagner on the evening of the 6th by the second Cabinet Secretary, Lutz. Making his way to the Briennerstrasse house in the twilight of the winter afternoon, he found Wagner sitting at tea with Cosima and his friend Peter Cornelius. Lutz, a poor schoolmaster's son from Franconia, must have derived a certain satisfaction from conveying the message which toppled the great Wagner. Cornelius later described the little man's triumphant air as he announced the King's wish that Wagner should without delay leave Munich for a few months. Wagner, thunderstruck, at first refused to believe what he had heard and pointed at the last letter he had received from the King, signed 'unto death, until we cross to the next world, eternally, eternally, your truest friend, Ludwig'. Then, when Lutz made it clear that he was in earnest, Wagner began such a tirade of abuse against Pfistermeister that Lutz had to tell him: 'Restrain yourself, I am here as an official.'²⁴

A Triumph, an Idyll and a Parting

The following day, by way of softening the blow, Ludwig sent a personal letter to the Briennerstrasse:

My dear Friend,

Much as it grieves me, I must ask you to comply with the wish I communicated to you yesterday through my Secretary. Believe me, I had to act as I did. My love for you will never die, and I beg you to retain for ever your friendship for me; with a clear conscience I can say that I am worthy of it. Sundered, who can part us? I know you feel with me. I know you can measure the whole depth of my sorrow. I could not do otherwise: be assured of that, and *never* doubt the fidelity of your best friend. It will certainly not be forever.

Until death

Your

faithful Ludwig.²⁵

At a quarter to six on the morning of 10 December, Wagner left Munich for Switzerland, accompanied only by his Bohemian servant Franz Mrazek and his old dog Pohl. He was seen off at the station by Cosima, Cornelius and two other friends, Heinrich Porges and his wife. He looked old, pale and tired. As the train pulled out of Munich he must have known in his heart that he would never return there to live.