

‡For the athlete and the sportsman.

WAGNER, A MONSTER GENIUS

HE was an undersized little man, with a head too big for his body; a sickly little man. His nerves were bad. He had skin trouble. It was agony for him to wear anything next to his skin coarser than silk. And he had delusions of grandeur.

He was a monster of conceit. He believed himself to be one of the greatest dramatists in the world, one of the greatest thinkers, and one of the greatest composers. To hear him talk, he was Shakespeare, and Beethoven, and Plato, rolled into one. And you would have had no difficulty in hearing him talk. An evening with him was an evening spent in listening to a monologue. Sometimes he was brilliant; sometimes he was maddeningly tiresome. But whether he was being brilliant or dull, he had one sole topic of conversation: *W h a t he* thought and what *he* did. The slightest hint of disagreement from anyone, on the most trivial point, was enough to set him off on a harangue that might last for hours, in which he proved himself right in so many ways, that in the end his hearer, stunned and deafened, would agree with him for the sake of peace. He had theories

about almost every subject under the sun, including vegetarianism, the drama, politics, and music; and in support of these theories he wrote pamphlets, letters, books—thousands upon thousands of words, hundreds and hundreds of pages. He not only wrote these things, and published them—usually at somebody else's expense—but he would sit and read them aloud, for hours, to his friends and his family.

He wrote operas. And no sooner did he have the synopsis of a story, than he would invite—or rather summon—a crowd of his friends to his house and read it aloud to them. Not for criticism. For applause. When the complete poem was written, the friends had to come again, and hear *that* read aloud. Then he would publish the poem, sometimes years before the music was written that went with it. He played the piano in the worst way. And he would sit down at the piano before parties that included some of the finest pianists of his time, and play for them, by the hour—his own music, needless to say. He would invite eminent vocalists to his house, and sing them his operas, taking all the parts.

When he felt out of sorts, he would rave and stamp, or sink into suicidal gloom and talk darkly of going to the East to end his days as a Buddhist monk. Ten minutes later, when something pleased him, he would rush out of doors and run around the garden, or jump up and down on the sofa, or stand on his head. He could be grief-stricken over the death of a pet dog, and he could be callous and heartless to a degree that would make a Roman emperor shudder.

Not only did he seem incapable of supporting himself, but it never occurred to him that he was under any obligation to do so. He was convinced that the world owed him a living. In support of this belief, he borrowed money from everybody who was good for a loan—men, women, friends, or strangers. He wrote begging letters by the score, sometimes loftily offering his intended benefactor the privilege of contributing to his support, and being mortally offended if the recipient declined the honor.

On an income that would reduce a more scrupulous man to doing his own laundry, he would keep two servants. Without enough money in his pocket to pay his rent, he would have the walls and ceilings of his study lined with pink silk. No one will ever know—certainly

he never knew—how much money he owed. We do know that his greatest benefactor gave him \$6,000 to pay the most pressing of his debts, and a year later had to give him \$16,000 to keep him from being thrown into jail for debt.

He was unscrupulous in other ways. He mistreated his first wife terribly. His second wife had been the wife of his most devoted friend and admirer, from whom he stole her. And even while he was trying to persuade her to leave her first husband he was writing to a friend to inquire whether the friend could suggest some wealthy woman—*any* wealthy woman—whom he could marry for her money.

He was completely selfish in his other personal relationships. His liking for his friends was measured solely by the completeness of their devotion to him, or by their usefulness to him. The minute they failed him—even by so much as refusing a dinner invitation—or began to lessen in usefulness, he cast them off without a second thought.

He had a genius for making enemies. He would insult a man who disagreed with him about the weather. He would pull endless wires in order to meet some man who admired his work, and was able and anxious to be of use to him—and would

proceed to make a mortal enemy of him with some idiotic and wholly uncalled-for exhibition of arrogance and bad manners.

The name of this monster was Richard Wagner. Everything that I have said about him you can find on record. And the curious thing about this record is that it doesn't matter in the least. Because this undersized, sickly, disagreeable, fascinating little man was right all the time. The joke was on us. He *was* one of the world's great dramatists; he *was* a great thinker; he *was* one of the most stupendous musical geniuses that the world has ever seen. The world *did* owe him a living. What if he did talk

about himself all the time? If he had talked about himself for twenty-four hours everyday for the span of his life he wouldn't have uttered half the number of words that other men have spoken and written about him since his death.

When you consider what he wrote—thirteen operas and music dramas, when you listen to what he wrote, the debts and heartaches that people had to endure from him don't seem much of a price. The miracle is that what he did in the little space of seventy years could have been done at all, even by a great genius. Is it any wonder that he didn't have time to be a man?—*Deems Taylor, condensed from Talks.*

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Leading Isms

TOTALITARIANISM was invented within the last fifteen years to describe a form of state which regulates everything. It was described by Mussolini, "Everything for the state; nothing apart from the state." Russia, Italy, and Germany are all totalitarian states.

Communism in our modern political dictionary means the philosophy of history, organisation and strategy advanced by Karl Marx. In practice Communism is the organisation of a nation into one big corporation of interlocking trusts, with the control vested in the hands of a dictator, who can determine wages and hours of labour.

Capitalism is the production of wealth by private enterprise; the use of wealth in private hands to create more wealth.—*Dorothy Thompson, from Good Housekeeping.*