

TANNHÄUSER

Wagner's magnificent grand opera, "Tannhauser," will be presented in concert form by the Royal Christchurch Musical Society in the Civic Theatre, on Wednesday, April 29, and will be broadcast by 3YA. This performance will be one of the finest productions yet given to the public by this society, the musical director of which is Mr. W. H. Dixon, L.R.A.M., A.R.C.M. A full chorus and orchestra will take part in the presentation and the roles of the soloists are well cast.

TO many persons "Tannhauser" is the greatest of all operas. It represents a period in the life of the author, Wagner, before he had abandoned the opera form for the music drama. Its music is of noble character throughout. It does not, like the "Ring of the Niebelungen" deal chiefly with the sins and the weaknesses of pagan gods, but with those of aspiring, suffering, self defeated humanity. To those who look for the moral lesson in a work of art, there is disappointment; for the whole opera, with its magnificence of structure and its richness of detail, at the bottom only typifies the struggle between the good and the baser elements of the human soul.

The operas of Richard Wagner fall into two classes. There are those—like "Parsifal" and the Ring series—which bore plain people and delight the intelligentsia. There are the earlier works—like "Tannhauser"—at which too clever people sniff, and which, with their beautiful melodies and clear stories, please the majority.

WAGNER was the first composer to write the words as well as the music of his operas, thereby obtaining a completer harmony between what may be called their bodies and their souls. His plots were usually taken from Germanic national legends, that of "Tannhauser" probably proving the most popular. A wandering minstrel of that name seems to have existed in the thirteenth century, while the hero of the legend was a converted rake. After plunging into a vortex of pleasure on the Venusberg, he was rescued by the blessed Virgin and went to Rome to seek absolution. But this was denied, and he returned to his voluptuous joys.

Wagner embroidered on this, promoting the wandering minstrel to be a romantic knight at the Court of Thuringia, where tournaments of song had superseded the clash of lances. Princess Elizabeth, the beautiful niece of the reigning Landgrave, used to bestow

CHARACTERS:

Herman—Landgrave of Thuringa—Bass T. D. Williams
Tannhauser—Minstrel Knight—Tenor R. T. Laurensen
Walther—Minstrel Knight—Tenor S. Andrews
Biterolf—Minstrel Knight—Bass J. T. Wilson
Schreiber—Minstrel Knight—Tenor H. Blakely
Reinmar—Minstrel Knight—Bass R. S. H. Buchanan
Elizabeth—Niece of the Landgrave—Soprano Mrs. C. Tail
Venus—Goddess of Love—Soprano Mrs. C. Tail

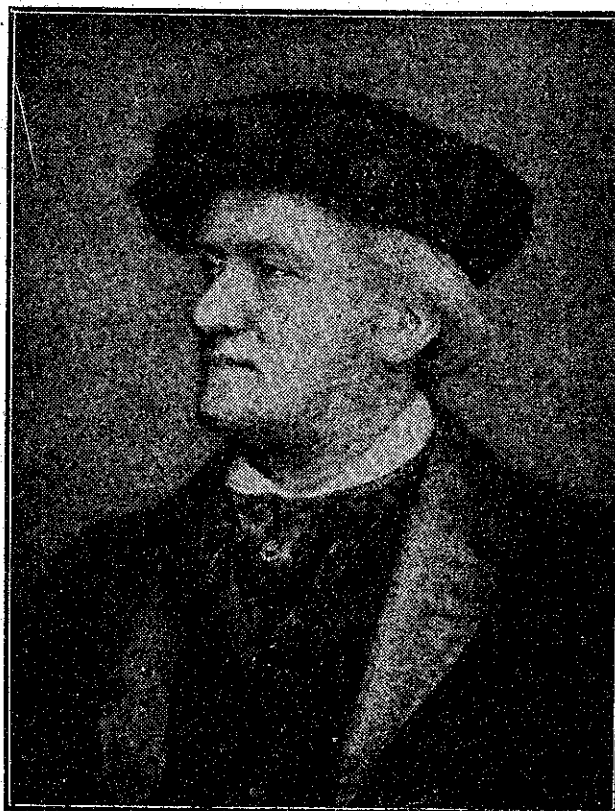
guerdons of flowers upon the victors, among whom Heinrich von Tannhauser was usually supreme. Indeed, the tender touch of his harp and the wonderful trills of his rich voice bewitched Elizabeth, so that her fair hands trembled as she wreathed his brow with flowers.

But Tannhauser was a child of Nature, imbued with strong animal passions, and a life of song and flowers and courtly graces did not content him, even with the crowning hope of a lovely princess as his bride. So one day he sped away to the Venusberg, where the Goddess of Love presided over wild revels, luring men's souls to perdition. Elizabeth wept and pined, taking no further interest in tournaments of song; and, meanwhile, the lost knight abandoned himself to sensual delights, taking no heed of the lapse of weeks, and months and seasons.

OF a sudden, however, at the end of a year, he awoke as from a trance, and realised the satiety of pleasure. Though sirens and naiads of transcendent glory disported themselves about the pink waters of a gleaming lake, though the air was filled with celestial strains and Venus showed herself exceeding kind, Tannhauser heard the call of church bells, the call of duty and godliness and honest toil.

Venus was loath to let him go; she cursed him and condemned him to misery and scorn. But presently we see him kneeling amid pastoral surroundings to return thanks to Heaven for his release. And thus he was found by the minstrel knights of Thuringia on their way home from a hunt in the forest. They were a brilliant cavalcade of knights and squires, all clad in Lincoln green as they streamed down the valley with Tannhauser in their midst.

A grand tournament of song was announced, with the hand of the Princess as victor's prize. The theme was the praise of love, and young Wolfram sang how he loved her from afar, how his only desire was to die in her service. Others followed in the same strain, but when the turn (Concluded on page 29.)



Richard Wagner.