

WAGNER AND A VICTORY.

The Festspielhaus of Beyruth was crowded. Eighteen hundred persons leaned forward and listened, for it was the opening note of the overture to "Tannhauser." A woman fainted and was taken out.

As they listened, side by side, he held her hand in his. For a moment she gazed at him with a wistful, silent, passionate reproach. Then she let him hold it, weakly, recklessly, though she was afraid of him and hated him.

"Tonight! You must tel. me, angel—tonight or never."

He always called her angel now. At first she had struggled against it, but he had persevered and won his point, as he always did. And she liked it, although she saw the incongruity of the word on his lips.

Still she was not mad. He used to say to her she was too beautiful ever to be bad. She really did not know what she was. She scarcely cared so long as his touch thrilled her hand.

"Tonight, Angel, tonight, you must tell me, or never!"

Often she wondered afterward how she could listen to him. She always felt small and passive standing or sitting beside him. He always forced his dominating masculinity on her puzzled consciousness. With him she always remembered she was only a woman.

Holding strongly her little hand he asked her again for the seventh time: "Angel, tonight or never?"

"A woman cannot hold out forever," was the thought that ran through his mind. The woman who could not hold out forever took her head of sunny hair half wistfully, half sorrowfully half dreadfully and looked up in his face. The devil sent a sudden, terrible woman's loneliness sweeping through her soul. Her great, appealing gray eyes fought mutely and pitifully against his steady gaze.

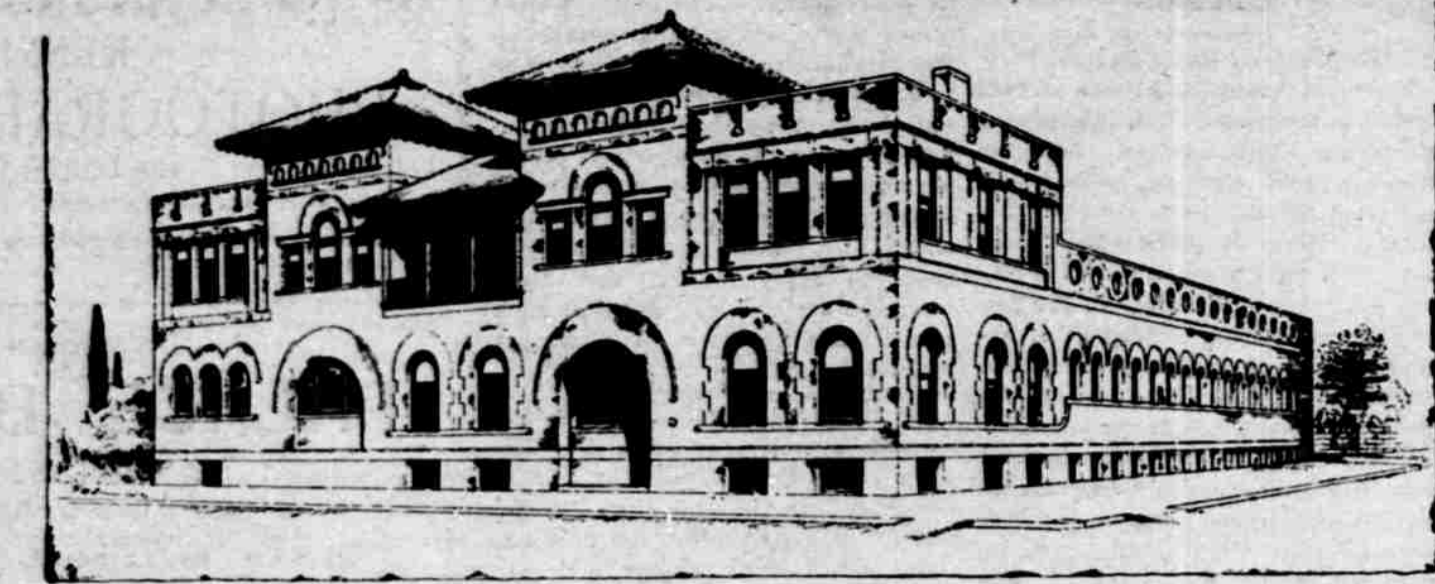
"A woman cannot hold out forever," said the man to himself. All her blood, with its piteous, impotent, four generations of New England Puritanism, seemed to sweep back to her thumping heart and leave her light-headed, bewildered and lost.

"No woman," said the man to himself "can hold out forever—" Suddenly, startlingly the music struck up. The crash of sound filled the listening Festspielhaus.

"Hush," she whispered, "it's Tannhauser."

The man flushed, frowned and listened. He did not understand Wagner—nor women. To her it was plain—plain as the print in a book. The man watched her eyes change as the motif of the music crept over her. It was the awful strife in the soul of Tannhauser between earth and heaven, between the passion of the Venusberg and the adoration of the pure Elizabeth. It was the solemn tread of the monastic pilgrims breaking through the soft, voluptuous, alluring whisperings of the sirens of the Venusberg. It was the struggle of spirit against flesh. Chord by chord it wafted him away from her. By the light in her eyes he knew it. When she drew away her hand he knew better than to hold it.

"Beautifully done, my dear, beautifully done, eh?" She knew that shrill, thin voice and was grateful for it. It was her husband. "Too late for seats, you know, my dear, but I couldn't miss it, not for words. Finished up the chapter and came to join the young folks: Now that's what I call music, Harrington, eh? But you diplomats never think of such things, eh? Too sentimental for your profession. But there is really something & Wagner, you know. Good moral,



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you see—Tannhauser breaking the degrading spell of Venus, you know, and going off with the pilgrim monks to Rome, and all that sort of thing. But what's this, my dear? Ill, eh? Well, well, of course we'll go home, my dear, if Harrington will excuse us. Dear me, why didn't you say so before, eh? Quite true, my love—not looking well."

Outside was silence. The sleepy little town of Beyruth lay below them.

"Was it noise, my love. Same with me at first. That's the trouble with Wagner—eh?" said her husband, looking at her over his glasses.

"Yes, it was the music, thank God—oh—er—I mean—yes, the music, and I was too tired, Reginald." Then, after a pause, "Reginald, dear, hold my hand."

"Your hand, my dear—how extraordinary! I—I never did not such a thing in my life. But of course, my dear, of course!"

She drew him closer to her. She was taller than her husband by half a head. The woman sighed.

"Oh, Reginald, I—I am so tired of it all! Wouldn't it be nice to go home—I mean back to America?"

"What I wanted to do all along, my love—told you so a week ago."

"Then, dear, let's go home," said the girl with the sunny hair. "But, listen!" They paused for a moment. It was the great, resonant voice of Tannhauser singing to his eighteen hundred spell-bound listeners:

Zu Kampf und Streite wil ich stehen,
Sei's auch auf Tod und Untergehen—
Drum muss aus deinem Reich ich
fliehn,

O, Konigin, Gottin, lass mich ziehn!

"Great man, Wagner, eh?" said her husband.

The woman did not answer.

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