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the Ring of the
Nibelung

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WOTAN'S FAREWELL TO BRUNHILD.
RICHARD WAGNER'S

POEM

THE RING OF THE NIBELUNG

EXPLAINED AND IN PART TRANSLATED

BY

GEORGE THEODORE DIPOLOD, Ph.D.

AUTHOR OF "THE GREAT EPICS OF MEDIEVAL GERMANY," ETC.

NEW YORK

HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1888
PREFACE.

One of the noblest heirlooms derived from Teutonic antiquity is the myth of the Nibelungs, that race of supernatural beings who were supposed to dwell in Nibelheim, the abode of mist and gloom. The beginning of the myth dates back to the prehistoric era of Teutonic life—to the time when Wotan, Thor, Fricka, and Freyja, together with other gods and goddesses, were worshipped in the primeval forests of Germany. The Nibelung myths and sagas have been transmitted to us in several versions, which differ widely as to the matter and leading ideas of the story. The primitive features of the myth were more or less transformed in the course of time, and certain events of historical character, entirely foreign to the original traditions, were gradually introduced.

Out of this great mass of various and often contradictory elements Richard Wagner in a certain sense created the Nibelung myth anew, endowed it with a most beautiful and harmonious form, and preserved its spirit true to the earliest traditions. By this work, apart from his other productions, Wagner is entitled to hold a prominent place among German poets. The
present volume is not written for musicians, and consequently does not contain many references to Wagner's music.* It has been the principal aim of the author to consider the literary and poetic character of "The Ring of the Nibelung," and to show that Wagner was a great poet as well as composer.

Before entering upon the study of Wagner's poem, it is necessary to give some attention to those versions of the Nibelung story which form the source of the poet's inspiration. In this connection the author is obliged to refer to one of his former works, entitled "The Great Epics of Mediæval Germany, etc.," † in which the object was to present an historical and critical account of those poems, and an essay on Wagner's drama was then foreign to the purpose. Yet as the Nibelungen Lied, the greatest of mediæval German poems, was one of the important works considered in that volume, special attention was bestowed on the elucidation of the whole Nibelung story. From the nature of the subject, it will be impossible to avoid here a repetition of a few statements made in the "Great Epics," particularly as to the early Nibelung traditions, since they throw light on Wagner's great drama. On the other hand, some of the ancient sagas which have no immediate bearing on the Nibelungen Lied, and were therefore omitted in the "Great Epics," will be here given because they play a prominent part in Wagner's treatment of the subject.

* Whenever it has seemed expedient to allude to the music, Francis Hueffer's words in his work on Richard Wagner have been quoted.
† Roberts Brothers, Boston, 1882.