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Johannes Brahms and Hans Von Buelow

Otto E. Albrecht
not later than 1487. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the Gesamtkatalog fully records a "Seitengetreuer Nachdruck" (mentioned by Proctor) as of [Strassburg, Georg Husner, um 1493/94]. The two editions (of which Dr. Rosenbach's gift is the original) have the same number of leaves but the register of signatures is different. And now in 1933 comes the Check list of fifteenth century books in the Newberry Library, compiled by Pierce Butler, capping the structure with the date given as [1488] and the printer Johann Prüss.

OTHER RECENT GIFTS

Through the generosity of Mr. Joseph G. Lester the Library has received a copy of Law Triumphant, by Violet Oakley. The first volume of this beautifully published work contains a record of the ceremonies at the unveiling of Miss Oakley's mural paintings, "The Opening of the Book of the Law," in the Supreme Court room at Harrisburg, and the artist's journal during the Disarmament Conference at Geneva. The second volume, of plates, contains handsome reproductions of the Supreme Court paintings and of a series of forty-one drawings made by Miss Oakley at the Geneva Conference. Mr. Lester subscribed for a copy of this uniquely valuable work for the Library.

A gift of $150. was received in the spring from the Society of the Alumni of the College, to be devoted to the purchase of books in American literature.

Gifts recently received from Dr. Charles W. Burr include ten volumes of the 16th and early 17th centuries, mostly editions of and commentaries on Aristotle and other Greek classics.

JOHANNES BRAHMS AND HANS VON BUELOW

By Dr. Otto E. Albrecht

One of the most interesting items of the Brahms centenary exhibition at the University Library last May was an unpublished letter from Brahms to von Buelow, lent by Dr. Daniel Gregory Mason of Columbia University. This was briefly referred to in an article in the June number of the
Bilou sent me the letter (Brahms to Bilou) and I received it on May 28, 1888. I had previously asked Bilou to send me the autograph of Brahms.

William Mason.

Lieber Freund,

Es erwartet dich im nächsten Jahr die Eröffnung der neuen Oper. Ich freue mich auf dein Erscheinen und bin gespannt, was du mir verraten wirst.

Zu sehen waren und die wichtigsten Errungenschaften Trienschießbuden ausgebaut, gewiß fand ein großes Festival ein. Die Gäste sind e. W. die Menschen von der Stadt.

Er warfen à 10 Minuten Ein.
Jag hoppas att
jag ska få en
bättre, mer
justerbar
utmatning.

Jag är inte
lätt att
sluta
med.

Folk
är
talrika,
men
ett
vitt
sätt
att
lätt
få
bättre
slut.

Grym
rynk
och
lov
alltid
finns.

Fyll
allt
med
ljus
och
våg
for
jag
är
bästa.

Spegel

J. Brahms
Weimar, under introduction having become Joachim von Buelow, a distinguished pianist and teacher, to von Buelow for a Brahms autograph, and thus escaped the attention of the editors of the correspondence of the two musicians. William Mason, who was a distinguished pianist and teacher, knew both Brahms and von Buelow personally, having met Brahms in 1853 at the home of Franz Liszt in Weimar, when the 20-year old composer was just beginning to become known. It was this friendship which accounted for Brahms’ first chamber music work, the B major Trio, having its world première in New York in 1855, and for the introduction of the A major piano quartet and the sextet in B flat to American audiences.

The first and last pages of the letter are reproduced here, and show a portrait of von Buelow. How are we to account for a letter bearing the picture of the person to whom it is addressed? The only plausible solution seems to be that Brahms, during an earlier visit to von Buelow, had been struck by his friend’s modest note-paper and had helped himself to some of it, later hitting on the original idea, characteristic of his sly humor, of sending the portrait back to the owner. Whether von Buelow accepted this as delicate flattery we do not know, but in any case he did not refer to the picture in his reply. Brahms had done the same thing a few months before, in congratulating his friend upon his engagement to Marie Schanzer.

Von Buelow in his youth was an ardent champion of the new German school, represented by Liszt and Wagner, and gave up a legal career after a performance of Lohengrin under Liszt at Weimar. He met the youthful Brahms in 1854 and played some of his piano works before Brahms and Joachim issued their manifesto directed against the new German school. Devoting all his attention to music, he rapidly became recognized as one of the greatest conductors and pianists of his time. He married Liszt’s daughter, Cosima, but after ten years she deserted Liszt for Richard Wagner, and from that time his enthusiasm for the music of Liszt and Wagner began to cool. At this juncture he again met Brahms and showed a great curiosity about the works of the composer who was regarded as the leader of the opposition to the new German school. It was not until the completion of the First Symphony, however, that von Buelow became an active cham-
pion of Brahms and invented the phrases "the tenth symphony" to declare the Brahms First a worthy successor to Beethoven's nine, and "the three B's"—Bach, Beethoven and Brahms.

In 1880 von Buelow was appointed conductor of the court orchestra of the Duke of Saxe-Meiningen, and in his five years' tenure of that post made it into one of the finest orchestras on the continent. Although it was less than half as large as our great orchestras of today, many rehearsals and few concerts resulted in flawless execution and enabled both conductor and orchestra to dispense with notes. In 1881 von Buelow invited Brahms to come to Meiningen to hear the orchestra and try out any new orchestral works he might have. Brahms' first appearance there, playing his second piano concerto under von Buelow's direction, as the climax of an all-Brahms program, was immensely successful and the Duke was delighted with his music and his personality. From that time on Brahms was always a welcome visitor at Meiningen, and he expressed his gratitude by dedicating to the Duke his Gesang der Parzen, which he completed in July 1882. This work for chorus and orchestra, a setting of a portion of Goethe's Iphigenie, was to have had its first performance at the ducal court under Brahms' direction, but on account of a prolonged illness of von Buelow, the concert had to be postponed, and the work had its premiere at Basel on December 10, 1882, followed by performances in Zürich and Strasbourg during the same month, and in some smaller German cities early in 1883.

After Brahms' first visit to Meiningen, the two men had become very intimate. During the first few months of 1882 the Meiningen orchestra went on tour and gave several successful Brahms concerts in Berlin and Leipzig. At the Berlin concert, on von Buelow's birthday, Brahms, who was soloist in his first piano concerto, further intensified the friendship by using the familiar and intimate "Du" to his colleague. Von Buelow's admiration for Brahms and his compositions was illustrated once again by his giving a piano recital in Vienna devoted exclusively to Brahms' works.

It was at this period of their relations that Brahms wrote the letter that is the subject of this article. Just after New Year's Day, 1883, von Buelow had recovered sufficiently from his illness to attend a rehearsal, and was greeted with the time-honored "Tusch" or instrumental flourish by the mem-
bers of his orchestra. Brahms heard of this event promptly, perhaps from Herr Hilpert, one of the players, and wrote a cheerful letter to congratulate his friend on his recovery. As we have von Buelow's reply to this letter dated January 7, and a letter from the Duke also referring to the conductor's reappearance at a rehearsal, dated January 3, the date of Brahms' letter must be January 4 or 5. It was written from his home, No. 4 Carlsgasse in Vienna, where he spent the first two weeks of the New Year. A translation of this letter follows:

Jan. 83

Dear, honored friend,

You know I am more or less a member of your orchestra and so it is annoying that I wasn't able to take part in the flourish at your reception. Of course there were triumphal arches set up on the Roman decorations, of course the bass drum had a hole knocked in it, and perhaps that morning there were even two ten-minute pauses—in short, I think it was all happy and lovely and must speak of it in retrospect with joy, and with envy at not having been there.

Now I beg you however to let Mr. Hilpert off from at least one rehearsal a week, so that he may always give me detailed news of you and of everything that goes on about you. Particularly, I must know soon when you intend to go away, for I shall be going very soon myself, and would like to have a visit with you sometime (perhaps the beginning of February). His Highness the Duke has invited me for the first of April.

Now if I say: "I'll come very gladly"—do the first two or the last two words count most?

The fact is I cannot see so far ahead and really thought I would be somewhere around Girgenti then. Now I am to conduct my second symphony at the Whitsuntide Festival at Cologne—so—when—but—but Girgenti too is a lovely prospect, and Meiningen and your orchestra too; let's leave it open for a while.

I am here only for about a week, and so in the greatest confusion—this can therefore be only a slight expression of my great joy at knowing that you are well and lively again; greetings to you straight from the heart of

Your devoted

J. BRAHMS.
It seems that the Duke, wishing to give von Buelow ample time to prepare Brahms' *Gesang der Parzen* for performance, planned to have the work played and to formally accept the dedication on his (the Duke's) birthday, on April 2, and had invited Brahms to come and stay at court. Brahms, not knowing that the reason for the further delay was von Buelow's health, refers somewhat vaguely to a trip to his beloved Sicily, and von Buelow succeeds in persuading the Duke to arrange the concert for February. In von Buelow's reply to our letter¹ he thanks his friend for his “epistolary flourish” but complains that his nerves still bother him. He quotes the Duke's consent to a February concert; “since Maestro Br. is determined to go to the somewhat desolate Girgenti, to the Sicilian bandits, he is welcome early in February and will naturally be my guest.”

Brahms did indeed come to Meiningen on February 12, between performances of the *Gesang der Parzen* in Schwerin and Oldenburg, but the new choral work was not performed at Meiningen on this occasion. Von Buelow was again too ill to conduct, and a greater shock was in store for him. Richard Wagner died at Venice the next day, February 13. The news was kept from von Buelow at first, but on the 14th a black-bordered letter from Bayreuth arrived and produced a terrible effect. Brahms was a witness to the distressing behavior of his friend, who turned pale and fell on the floor in a convulsive rage, unable to speak. His health suffered a complete breakdown and he did not regain his strength for some months. Brahms meantime forgot the hostility of Wagner and his followers toward his own works, and dispatched a wreath to Bayreuth, which seems to have remained unacknowledged by the implacable Cosima. The Sicilian journey was abandoned, if indeed it was ever seriously planned, and Brahms promised to conduct the *Gesang der Parzen* at the Duke's birthday concert on April 2. This took place in von Buelow's absence, the orchestra and chorus having been trained by a substitute conductor. A month later came the sixtieth Lower Rhenish Music Festival at Cologne, which Brahms had mentioned in his letter.

By January, 1884, von Buelow was well enough to take the orchestra on tour again, and on February 3 at Meiningen gave Brahms' new Third Symphony, with the composer con-

ducting. The concert began with the symphony "for the first
time," followed by a short Beethoven work, and closed with
the repetition of the symphony, "for the second time," a
typical gesture which von Buelow was not averse to making,
even with the Ninth Symphony of Beethoven. The following
year the Meiningen orchestra gave the first performance of
Brahms' Fourth Symphony before the Duke and then began
a long tour, with Brahms conducting the Symphony at each
concert and von Buelow the rest of the program. The latter
soon tired of this arrangement and planned to give a second
performance in Frankfurt and conduct the Symphony him-
self, to show how much better a conductor he was than
Brahms. This led to a misunderstanding between the two
men and von Buelow angrily telegraphed his resignation to
the Duke, being succeeded by his youthful assistant, Richard
Strauss. The two friends were reconciled after a few years,
but the happy days of their collaboration at Meiningen were
over. Hans von Buelow remains, however, along with
Joachim, the violinist, one of the greatest interpreters of
Brahms' music that the world has known.

Note. After this article was sent to the printer, the
writer received from Dr. Mason a letter from von Buelow
to William Mason, which accompanied the gift of the Brahms
letter translated on page 44. Von Buelow made a habit of
writing to his friends in their own language, and the following
quaintly-worded letter in English shows his admiration for his
American colleague.

Hamburg May 15th
89

My dear colleague:
happily homecomed last night before leaving again for Wies-
baden to cure my neuralgy before it grows worse—I hasten to
fulfill with my promise to present you with a letter of Maes-
trissimo Brahms. I never would give one to anybody on any
side of the Atlantic—to you, my old highly estimated co-pupil
I give two. As I am in a hurry I can but say good bye with
my best well wishes to your health's (of body & spirit)

Yours faithfully
Hans v Bülow