

# CHAPTER 15 - The Grand Opera Fad

Chapter 15 of "The Ways of Men" titled "The Grand Opera" delves into the diverse reasons people attend the opera, with a particular focus on Wagner's lengthy operas. The author is curious about the different classes of opera-goers, highlighting three main categories: the wealthy socialites who treat the opera as a social gathering rather than an art form, those who attend for the prestige and to be seen in high society, and the genuine music lovers who are often found in the less prestigious seats.

The chapter criticizes the first group for using the opera as a pretext for socializing, describing how the arrival timing and the engagement with the performance are more about being seen and less about the music. It humorously sketches the superficiality of their engagement, where the actual performances and the artists are secondary to the social interactions happening in the boxes and the audience's attire. The second group is similarly critiqued for their lack of genuine interest in the music, attending merely because it's considered a fashionable and elite activity. Despite their lack of musical understanding or appreciation, their presence is part of the opera's social fabric.

The real affection for opera is found among the third group, who are portrayed as sincere music lovers. Despite their higher placement in the theatre, their engagement and appreciation for the performances are highlighted as more authentic than that of those in the more expensive seats. The author compares this genuine enjoyment of music to a scene in Tangiers, where the local population is mesmerized by a musician, drawing a parallel between the heightened emotional states induced by music across different cultures.

Throughout the chapter, the author uses vivid analogies and critical observations to point out the superficiality and genuine appreciation found among opera-goers. The critiques of social superficiality versus genuine musical engagement offer a humorous yet pointed commentary on societal behaviors and priorities, ultimately questioning the varied motivations behind attending the grand opera.