

MUSIC OF THE WINTER.

THE past winter has afforded a great variety of entertainment to the musical world. It has been characterized by much activity, and by a decided expression of popular interest, with which no fault could be found, but that of its usual want of nice discernment. Instrumental music has made rapid strides, especially orchestral performances, and a liberal patronage, in some cases ill-bestowed, has attended the numerous vocalists, who have urged their claims upon us. A comparison of the present condition of the public ear with its former apathy, promises a still greater improvement, a more lively susceptibility to, and understanding of this divine art, and a stronger sympathy for the artist. To be able to discover true genius, to distinguish science from empiricism and the effrontery of pretension from the confidence of real merit, we must hear much music, and weigh not only its momentary impressions, but its after influences; the former are phantoms, the latter are truth, and are laid up with our other gifts of beauty. A cultivated taste is the fruit of time, experience, and thought; it can be acquired, where no natural defect opposes a barrier to the power of sound, and the audiences of the past winter have shown a willingness to hear, which will gradually ripen into an appreciation of all that is worthy and undying in the art.

The Boston Academy of Music have presented some of the finest orchestral performances that we have ever heard. The unity of effect, and the equality and precision of their instrumental music, are worthy of the highest praise, and reflect credit upon the members of the band, as well as their accomplished and graceful leader. Mr. Schmidt is an ornament to his profession, and a true supporter of its dignity, a musician of rare taste and steady growth. The choir of the Academy is large and well-trained, and the organ parts are sustained by Mr. Müller with great readiness and accuracy.

The concerts and oratorios of the Handel and Haydn Society have been deservedly well attended throughout the winter. The chorus is excellent, and its members have attained a high degree of perfection in the performance of their

parts. If any suggestion could be made, it would be the propriety of a little more light and shade, which is with difficulty imparted to such a volume of tone. A larger choir might be more impressive, but we doubt whether any of equal number could be found more correct and effective. The solos are seldom well given; and there are many, such as "I know that my Redeemer liveth," and "Thou shalt dash them in pieces," from the Messiah, that are only within the scope of the most exalted talent, and are the cause of pain when poorly executed. The former of these songs, we believe, is never heard, except under the auspices of some distinguished vocalist. A proper performance of such compositions can hardly be expected from an amateur; to do them justice, requires the preliminary study of years, and the extreme cultivation of an artist. In the engagement of Mr. Braham, this society have not only contributed to their own improvement, but greatly added to the pleasure of the musical world.

The fame and talents of this wonderful singer deserve a separate and lengthened notice; for he has been the bright star of our winter season. He was heralded by a reputation, upon which forty years have been shedding a constant lustre, and he has passed away without leaving upon our minds one feeling of disappointment, and no regret, except that which his farewell has awakened. The name of Braham is connected with all that is dear in English music; for years and years he has ruled the audiences of his native land with the sway of an autocrat, till his genius has been almost deified, and his blemishes excused, and even imitated with fondness. Nature has denied him nothing, while Art has moulded his pliant qualities nearly to perfection. In the prime of life, when his physical powers answered every demand of an exuberant fancy, and the resources of soul and voice were equal, we can conceive of that general enthusiasm, which recognised no fault in this King of Song; and it is, perhaps, to the sacrifices that he has made for unbounded popularity, that we may attribute the faults, which have long displeased even those who loved him best. Mr. Braham's arrival in this country was unexpected, and the announcement of his first appearance in this city aroused an interest, which showed the extent of his fame. Many will remember the thronged audience that

greeted him, the mingled expressions of disappointment and pleasure, which were called forth by his singing, and the ignorant and unjust criticism which followed upon expectations unrealized. Very few remembered his history, his age and services; and the novelty of his style, because not immediately comprehended, was by many received with coldness; but there were some, whose respect for the name of Braham made them cautious of first impressions, and upon these minds the beauties of his performance dawned steadily and calmly. His voice is a pure tenor, possessing fulness, richness, delicacy, pathos, and the most wonderful flexibility. His compass was originally about nineteen notes, and this, though slightly impaired, he seems to retain; while throughout its whole extent there is a remarkable equality of tone and skilful blending of the registers, that render every portion available. With all these natural qualifications of voice, Mr. Braham has the greatest science, the most undoubted taste, and an experience which enables him to surmount all the obstacles of his profession. The versatility of his talents, and the ease with which he has at any time been able to sacrifice his own preferences to popular will, has subjected him to that harsh criticism, which for many years has analyzed so closely the beauties and defects of his style. Yet the steady splendor which he has maintained in the face of disparagement, and the strength of wing, which, after descending to pamper a vulgar taste, could bear him unrivalled into the regions of classic song, have given to Braham the reputation of the world's greatest tenor. Although he is emphatically an English singer, yet the traces of an Italian education are perceptible, especially in the expression of sentiment and passion. In this, we think, lies his forte, but not to the exclusion of other beauties. There is at times a purity of tone that appears almost unearthly; a clear, transparent undulation, that seems as free from physical agency as the sound of dropping water; sometimes it breathes of tenderness, sometimes of grief; now it startles the ear like the note of a clarion, and now we follow its dying cadence into the softest whisper of pity or love. Remember the accents of despair in the recitative of "Jephtha's Vow," and the sweetness of the prayer that follows it; the tremulant grief of Samson for the loss of sight; the divine expression given

to those passages of the Messiah, "Comfort ye my people," and "Thy rebuke hath broken his heart;" the magnificent execution of "Thou shalt dash them in pieces," and we must think of Braham as peerless and alone. Listen to his voice in the gentle and captivating melody of Beethoven's "Adelaide;" in the playfulness of his Scotch and English ballads; in the thrilling strains of "Marmion," the "Death of Nelson," Napoleon's Midnight Review," and the fine nautical song, the "Bay of Biscay," it is still unrivalled, unsurpassed.

With the deepest enthusiasm for the singing of Braham, we could not, if we would, esteem him faultless; his defects are too glaring to escape even the uncultivated ear; they expose him to illiberal and ignorant criticism, to prejudice and neglect. They have become confirmed during a long life of professional industry and exertion. For many, an indulgent public are accountable; for others, his own neglect, not ignorance, must stand rebuked. He is often careless and loose in execution, displaying at times a redundancy of ornament, which is uncalled for and unmeaning, and displeases a severe taste, even when well performed. His genius supports him equally in the purest orchestral style, as in the most brilliant and meretricious composition; he is simple or ornate, chaste or unrefined, with the audience before him; and displays a willingness to surrender his own knowledge of the beautiful, for the sake of indiscriminate gratification. A frequent explosive and abrupt manner of terminating a tone is one of his most unpleasant defects, for the ear is startled and pained by being harshly deserted; and an incorrectness of tune, the most unpardonable fault in a singer, is by no means of rare occurrence.

Yet, with all that may be said in disparagement of Mr. Braham; we believe him to have been the finest tenor of the world; and now that age has crept upon him, we would view his failings with tenderness, for the sake of the glory that has been; and glean from the ruin the splendid relics of the past. We must now estimate him by the power of imagination, and fancy the noon-day brightness of that sun, which is near its setting. There are many, who think he has stayed too long; that he should have "rushed to his burning bed" with undimmed splendor, like that of tropic

eve. With such we cannot sympathize. We would cherish to the last that genius, over the grave of which ages will pass and bring no equal; and hang with rapture over the last echo that returns the voice of Braham.

The opera has been maintained with credit by Mr. and Mrs. Wood, and Brough. This trio have always been favorites with the Boston public, and their reception was flattering. Mrs. Wood, we think, has improved in strength, but lost somewhat in delicacy of expression; her style is now too florid, and at times, her singing is almost coarse. Mr. Wood has gained much; and though by no means a remarkable singer, exhibits much pathos and feeling in the execution of passionate music. Mr. Brough, during his whole engagement, disappointed those who had formerly commended him; he was negligent and careless, and seems to augur no farther excellence. Mr. Wood has promised to return with a new selection of music, and retire himself from the stage in favor of some more distinguished tenor. We wish that there were a more general attendance upon operatic performances. A familiarity with them gives discrimination to popular taste, and prepares the ear to receive and appreciate more dignified and elevated musical composition.

It is very evident, that, at the present time, the simplest music is that which is the most kindly listened to; and for this reason, as well as their freedom from pretension, the Rainers have become favorites with the public. We should like to hear them sing on the bosom of one of those beautiful lakes in their native land, with a full moon above, and the ripple below, where the simple harmony of their quartette would be in keeping with the scene; in the concert-room, there is a monotony and repetition in their music, which soon becomes tiresome.

The winter has, of course, not passed, without one or more visits from Mr. Russell. Under the auspices of this distinguished man, a new class of songs has sprung to life, which seems devoted to the romance of domestic antiquities, such as old nurse-lamps, old farm-gates, and old arm-chairs. We were somewhat surprised at the versatility of talent, that could descend from a theme so grand as the "Skeptic," (which, to say the least, contains some interesting reminiscences,) to subjects so humble; the step,

however, from the sublime to the ridiculous is but short, and we doubt not these compositions will, like the Jew's razors, answer the end for which they were created.

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