

MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

The climax of the Mendelssohn Choir cycle of concerts was reached last night, when Beethoven's Ninth, or Choral Symphony, colossal in proportions and stupendous in conception, was the principal work of the evening. While of necessity the aid of the Pittsburg Orchestra was called in to produce the work, the choral achievement was one that has never been paralleled in this city. The production of the Symphony as a whole is but rarely attempted, even in the great musical centres of the world, so extreme are the executive demands upon the chorus and the vocal soloists. In Pittsburg recently, the home of the visiting orchestra, Mr. Paur gave at one of the regular concerts of his organization the instrumental portions of the work, but there was no local chorus that could crown the work, and the finale was consequently omitted. In this monumental symphony Beethoven called in the human voices to give more definite expression to his ideas, to an inspiration that had seized him years before, and which led him to utilize a portion of Schiller's "Ode to Joy" as the words for the last movement. But as he himself remarked to Wagner, "the hymn is a beautiful and inspiring poem, but far from speaking that which certainly in this connection no verses in the world could say." When Beethoven was seized with a musical conception of grandeur, he did not consider the ordinary limitations of either singers or instrumentalists in his method of realization, and the vocal portion of the Ninth Symphony is an extreme example of his obliviousness of technical difficulties. But the choral symphony is not impossible, granting favorable circumstances, and last night's concert proved that with such a choir as the Mendelssohn it is not impossible here. What the choir accomplished in successfully singing the finale of this work and what their conductor accomplished in preparing them for the performance with such self-sacrificing, such loving labor and care, the musical public of Toronto may well be proud of. Unity of interpretation was a necessity, and to preserve this it was necessary to have the production directed by Mr. Emil Paur, who by reason of his familiarity with the music and his acknowledged genius as orchestral chief was eminently qualified to undertake the responsibility. And his conducting was an extraordinary feat of memory, of interpretation. This symphony, which takes an hour and a quarter in performance, which is exceptionally complex in its parts, although simple as a whole, he conducted without once opening the score which lay upon his desk, indicating the nuances, and giving the innumerable cues without hesitation, and at the same time offering a genuine reading. The feats of four modern piano virtuoso in memorizing a solo pales into insignificance beside so remarkable an exploit. There was no mere time-beating in Mr. Paur's work; it was the result of enthusiasm, of love for the music, and of profound acquaintance with its contents, its very fibre, its message. As to the composition itself, what has been written about it in tributes of admiration would fill several volumes, and it would be absurd to attempt to give an idea of its greatness, or even of the complete impression it creates, in a newspaper notice. But one may point to the fact that, great and grand as are its proportions, exacting as are its demands, it is strangely simple in its melodic utterances. But the simplicity is one of dignity, of grandeur that approaches sublimity. Nothing could scarcely be more direct or frank in its structure than the main theme of the choral finale, and yet when one hears how this theme is glorified one must come to the conclusion that anything more complex or less obvious would not have been an appropriate setting of the expression of the joy of millions, of humanity at large. The first movement is supposed by Wagner to suggest "the conflict between the soul seeking for joy and that adverse influence which rears itself between us and earthly happiness." In any case, as pure, dignified music, it is one of Beethoven's grandest efforts. The Scherzo, with its seizing theme so ingeniously treated and orchestrated, may be called a revel of gladness, while the slow movement is a song beautifully elaborated, of elevated sentiment and sheer abstract beauty. The finale, thanks to the Mendelssohn Choir, who are able to sing at the top of their register with sustained power and unwavering pitch, was in the rendering profoundly impressive in its massive, compactly welded tonal volume. When one considers the immense amount of pains, the exceptional executive material and the time required to prepare this symphony, it is not expected that it will be performed again for some years. But the memory of last night's production will long linger with those who had sympathy for such noble music. The vocal quartette in the finale were Mme. Rider-Kelcey, Mme. Isabelle Bouton, Mr. Van Yorx, and Mr. Herbert Witherspoon, who rendered their difficult music with artistic finish.

The other great work of the evening was Mendelssohn's descriptive cantata "The Walpurgis Night," which was conducted by Mr. Vogt. The music with all its dramatic effects is delightfully clear and is full of transparent melody. The choir sang grandly as usual, and piled up a most massive volume of tone in the full harmonies of the chorus, "Restrained by Might." Mr. Witherspoon, who was the solo baritone, surpassed his former efforts in the fervor with which he rendered his music and in the sonority of his voice. The tenor and alto solos were taken with distinction by Mr. Yorx and Mme. Bouton. Finally the choir, unaccompanied, gave an illustration of their rare command of beauty of tone and shading in Tchaikovsky's "Cherubim Song," and in response to the insistent encore their great success, "Scots Wha Hae."

That the popularity of "Trilby," one of the first of the dramatized novels to be placed on the stage a decade or so ago, has not waned was attested by the presence of a fashionable audience at the Princess Theatre last evening upon the occasion of the revival of the Du Maurier play by Mr. Wilton Lackaye and his company. It is not difficult for those who witnessed Mr. Lackaye's performance to understand the sensation which his earlier presentations of the principal part occasioned. His impersonation of Svengali last night was nothing less than a masterpiece of character acting, a denotement that never descended to caricature and was at all times impressive and intense, indicating at once the exultation of his

nystic power and the racking exhaustion which it produced. The Tribly O'Ferrall of Miss Jane Oaker was a much more acceptable offering than the Laura Judwin which Miss Oaker presented in "The Pit." Although she had a much more trying part Miss Oaker, it must be said, showed that it was more suited to her abilities and her embodiment of the heroine was faithful both in conception and execution. There is of course no mystery concerning the causes which helped to make the heroine and the play a favorite with the public. As it is staged it is filled with qualities which make the sturdiest appeal to the tastes and sympathy of the ordinary theatregoer. The sentimental and magnanimous adoration of the three chums, the suggestion of Bohemian improprieties, the Latin quarter revels, the melodramatic mysticism of Svengali, the stale old clerical hypocrite, all by this time familiar but none the less in a play interesting and even absorbing. Mr. Frank Dekum as Little Billie, Mr. Walter Pennington as Taffy and Mr. A. H. Stuart as The Laird of Cockpen, were a trio who satisfied every requirement of the allied parts. Mr. Ned Randon played Geoko with great acceptance and the remainder of the cast are all deserving of praise. A word of praise is due the unseen singer, Mrs. Marie Horgan, whose rendering of "Ben Bolt" was an unexpected treat.

The programme arranged for the orchestral matinee by the Pittsburg Orchestra, to be given under the auspices of the Mendelssohn Choir on Saturday afternoon, is one of exceptional importance and interest, both from the point of view of the music-lover and the music student. It reveals Mr. Paur as a master in the art of programme making, comprising as it does Tchaikovsky's immortal work, his Fifth Symphony, two of Wagner's finest orchestral works, The Funeral March and the Rhine Journey from "Die Gotterdammerung," diversified with lighter numbers, such as Weber's Overture to "Oberon" and another novelty, the love scene from Richard Strauss' "Feuersnoth." Another interesting novelty will be an excerpt from Mr. Paur's concerto for violin and orchestra, in which the solo part will be taken by Mr. Luigi Von Kunits, who is an artist well known to Toronto concertgoers. Seats for this concert are now on sale at the box office.

The engagement of Edna May and Charles Frohman's big London company in "The Catch of the Season" at the Princess Theatre will undoubtedly be one of the most enjoyable delights of the present theatrical year. Miss May comes here after her four months' triumph at Daly's Theatre, New York, and brief tour of the eastern and middle west capitals, where every performance was given to the capacity of the theatre in every place. From the accounts of our exchange, it is safe to say that no such combination has been seen here in years. Already theatre parties are organizing in town and out of town to enjoy this supreme musical and laughing theatrical event of the season.

For the week of Feb. 19 Manager Shea has a big bill, including Carlton Macy and Maude Hall, Parroa brothers, Asra Sam Watson and Cellina Bobe.