

THE KILT, THE BAGPIPE AND THE DANCE.

THE BAGPIPE.

THERE is no instrument so much admired as the great Highland bagpipe nor so much disliked. The vast majority of those who hear it are either ardent and enthusiastic in its praise, or viciously downright in its condemnation. There is a subtle analogy between the sentiments it arouses, and those with which we regard a man who is fearless and independent in character. It much depends upon the character of the other party whether such a man inspires strong dislike or equally strong admiration. These opposing sentiments argue a power over the senses which it would no doubt prove interesting and instructive to consider from a physiological standpoint. But at this time it may be better to point out circumstances nearer the surface which can be so modified as to weaken this dislike, and discover to the friendly ear fresh beauties in our national music. The instrument itself is an imperfect one at best, and in the hands of a student who is his own instructor, its imperfection is at once the undoing of the player and the ruin of any good opinion a disinterested third party might have formed. Yet it is a peculiar fact that a youth may discard after a time the study and practice of piano, violin, or almost any instrument, to take up another, but once the "plover" is begun, no matter how unsatisfactory progress is made, it is never relinquished for any other. Conditions may compel the would-be piper to give his time to pursuits more profitable and his enthusiasm may wane under the force of circumstances, but to his latest hour the sonorous tone of the bagpipe will quicken his pulse and suffuse the eye with tears. That it is capable of rendering music in form and matter unapproachable through any other medium is a consideration not often recalled, and when it is considered that this cannot be said of any musical instrument save the pipe of the Gael, the encouraging of its study and practice assumes an importance of which Scotsmen, in America especially, are only partially conscious. It is scarcely consistent with that spirit of independence and those high ideals which Scotsmen profess to revere when they post prandially orate, that they claim a share in the glorious name and deeds with which the bagpipe is inseparably associated, and at the same time show so little interest in fostering its practice and encouraging excellence in the performance of its music. They recognize how appropriate its presence is at their gatherings, but the thrifty instinct, rather than the generous impulse engendered by respect for art, dominates the selection of a player. Until we have a reasonable appreciation of what is due those who give conscientious and diligent study to acquire a knowledge of their instrument and the necessary practice to master it, we cannot expect, but that our national instrument will be the butt of cheap wit, and suffer that degradation which in this country too often brings the blush of shame to the Scotsman's cheek. Even from the standpoint of one who fails by lack of culture or a musical ear to appreciate the pipe and its unique music, there is this to be said, that for the sake of its historic associations, and because of its being identified with a race who have brought imperishable fame to the country of which it is now the characteristic musical instrument, its players should receive recognition who strive to do it justice.

Not only does the national pipe suffer neglect from those claiming themselves organized to "perpetuate in this the land of our adoption the memories, pastimes, manners and games of Auld Scotia," but it must be admitted that many, professing to play it, care nothing for it except as an aid to reach the pockets of their countrymen when they enthuse on such occasions as the annual games, ball, Burns' supper, etc., etc. A love of the instrument for its own sake has long since died within them. Such men as these scarcely understand what the word practice means, and their appearance in public does an incalculable amount of harm to the bagpipe.

Their egotism regarding their abilities is only equalled by their incapacity, and they attend at competitions only that they may profit at the expense of a good player through the ignorance of the judges. And this brings us to consider the difficulty of getting competent men to adjudicate. Even in Scotland this difficulty is recognized as a serious one. But competitors there are so numerous and the standard of playing so much higher than with us that the problem is solving itself, for none but men who are to a certain degree competent will accept the responsibility. One sighs a wish that such conditions may shortly obtain here. At present it is not the competitors the good player fears, but the judges. Some tune must be thought out that will "take" the judges' ear, and thus to win, the player is required to get down to a level, perhaps, much below his taste and capacity. Hence the object of awarding a prize is partially defeated. To judge well, one must have had the experience of hearing all sorts of players. The grasp which the mind must take of the tune, the manner in which it is accentuated the crowding of notes or the plain way in which it is rendered all demand the keenest mental capacity backed by knowledge of the instrument and wide experience among the best players. Many judges cannot tell whether or not a competitor's pipes are in tune. Nay, some pipers themselves who attain to a fair proficiency in technique are unable to tune their instrument correctly.

While this is overlooked, or, if observed, is treated all too lightly, great stress is laid upon what are commonly called "breaks" a sort of musical stutter or mistake which the very best players are liable to make. There can be no question that they really mar a performance most disagreeably but the actual work done should not be ignored as much as it is on account of such a blemish. A player who aims at high class and difficult music should not be discouraged by seeing a premium put upon easy and simple music. I have heard a player who could not be said to have made a mistake in the generally accepted sense of the term whose whole performance properly considered was one huge mistake. Again, I have listened to a player's playing that contained more evidence of merit in sixteen bars than some others who were not infrequent winners could have set forth in a lifetime. Great would be the protest among the class of pipers who attempt little and accomplish less if a judge with the courage of his convictions should discriminate in this way. But justice demands such discrimination, the interest of refined playing calls for it, and players should be encouraged to reach the topmost peak rather than content themselves with a safe spot half way up.

Judging that takes cognizance of "breaks" and similar errors and ignores a pipe out of tune or a tune played with a third or more of the

grace notes left out, is simply straining at the gnat and swallowing the camel. It is indisputable that to encourage players to risk attempting difficult music is to elevate the art, whereas to give prizes to players who shirk difficult music is to degrade it. Were it generally known that the bagpipe is one of the few instruments that man has never quite mastered, that endless patience, boundless enthusiasm and tireless effort are necessary to acquire a fair command of it, the genuine student, who loves the instrument for its own sake and strives to do it at least partial justice, would doubtless receive more respectful recognition than is now accorded him. Conditions also are against the development of high class talent in the use of the pipe. Those who must devote the major portion of their lives to earning a living at such callings as they follow, cannot give the attention and all which the term implies, to mastering the instrument. The masters of piano, violin, and other instrumental music, are all men and women who devote their lives to the work. So should this be with the pipe, if its capacity is ever to be really known.

Toronto, Ont.

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