

MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

WHEN we went to press last month the lovers of the drama at the Grand Opera House were enjoying a Dickens' revival in the representation of Halliday's version of "Nicholas Nickleby," and in the announcement of "Dombey and Son" as in active preparation. A dramatic representation of *Dotheboys Hall*, with its attendant incidents, pathetic and ludicrous, was a happy idea, as well as proving a fortunate financial hit for holiday attraction. The cheery, soul-enlarging creations of Dickens could not be more fittingly represented than at a season when the heart of humanity is being actively stirred by the claims of charity, kindness, love, peace and good-will. Besides the appropriateness of "Nicholas Nickleby" as a holiday play, the piece served also to recall to students of literature the annual "Christmas Story," or carol, which used to be one of the regular and welcome visitants of the holiday season, and seemed always to be struck off at the white-heat point of Dickens' genius.

To the juniors of the large audiences which the play attracted nothing could be more satisfying than the realistic effect produced by the management in getting up the piece. The first introduction to the rascally Yorkshire schoolmaster, Mr. Wackford Squeers—him "who had but one eye, though the popular prejudice runs in favour of two"—was one that excited the house to the greatest hilarity and enthusiasm. The famous Saracen's Head scene, the leave-taking of Nicholas Nickleby, the marshalling of the new pupils by the pedagogue, their tantalizing meal and hurried departure from the inn in a veritable coach-and-four, with all the flourish and circumstance that pertained to stage travel at the period, were vividly depicted and minutely portrayed. The subsequent introduction to the Hall—to Mrs. Squeers and its other inmates—the glimpse of the domestic economy and rare educational advantages of the institution, offered further scenes of lively entertainment and interest. The induction of the young usher to his duties, the examination of "the first class in English spelling and philosophy," the administration of the "brimstone and treacle," the social reunion of Miss Squeers, Tilda Price, and John Browdie with Nicholas, and the latter's interest in the forlorn Smike, formed additional scenes for amusing and exciting representation. Then followed the successive events of Smike's es-

cape and capture, the attempted chastisement and its terrible *dénouement*, the subsequent and successful flight of Smike and Nickleby, the encounter with Browdie on the highway, the final arrival in London and *rencontre* with the latter and his bride, with the introduction to Newman Noggs and Ralph Nickleby at the latter's office—each a scene enjoyed equally by anticipation as by reality. The home found for Smike, and the sad and final end of his career, then brought the representation to a close—a close witnessed amid hushed silence that spoke more eloquently than the most tumultuous applause. We have seen few plays at the Grand Opera House that have been more satisfactorily presented than this, and none that have seemed more to fit the dramatic aptitude of the company, and that called forth their best mimetic powers.

The leading parts taken by the *corps* were these:—*Mr. Squeers*—Mr. Spackman; *Nicholas Nickleby*—Mr. Roberts; *John Browdie*—Mr. Sambrook; *Ralph Nickleby*—Mr. Farwell; *Brooker*—Mr. Davis; *Snawley*—Mr. Humphreys; *Newman Noggs*—Mr. Curtis; *Smike*—Miss Davenport; *Mrs. Squeers*—Miss Carr; *Miss Squeers*—Mrs. Marlowe; *Tilda Price*—Miss Delmar; *Mrs. Nickleby*—Mrs. Vernon; and *Kate Nickleby*—Miss Davis. The acting of Miss Davenport as *Smike* was a revelation of new powers in this painstaking actress, and a vivid manifestation of the character Dickens has delineated. With a voice subdued by timidity and a broken spirit, and an appearance made wretched by want and ill-treatment, Miss Davenport's *Smike* was a visible and audible embodiment that touched the heart-strings of every beholder, and won for it the highest praise. The death scene was exceedingly creditable to dramatic art in our midst, and an artistic pleasure which enhanced the literary art already given us by the author. The personation of *Mr. Squeers* by Mr. Spackman was a capital one, and successfully individualized the compound of cruelty, villainy and humbug which the Master Humourist of his age intended to depict in the character. The scene which gives the opportunity to Nickleby and the school to avenge the accumulated wrongs of many days, and to repay with interest the flagellations he had meted out to his victims, was one of the keenest delight to the audience, and provocative of much