

Musical & Dramatic Notes.

BY VIOLA.

A correspondent, "Chromaticus," whose letter appeared in THE OBSERVER of last week, says he dissents altogether from my views touching the decline of the taste for oratorio here and elsewhere. Well, this would be a dull world if we all thought alike, and I do not expect that all my readers should agree with everything I say. "Chromaticus" advances his opinions in a very courteous and temperate manner, and it is therefore a pleasure to reply to him. Of course I can do no more than just skirt the edge of the subject; to deal comprehensively with it would take up a whole issue of THE OBSERVER, if not more. "Chromaticus" says: "That the change of sentiment, if any does exist, is the unfortunate sequel of the action of the majority of our conductors in the encouragement of the lighter and more romantic style of music." My proposition is just the reverse of this. I hold that our conductors supply the lighter and more romantic style of music in response to and in sympathy with the change in public sentiment, or, to put the case more tersely, the public want romantic music and will have it. The whole history of the development of modern music from the time of Weber is comprehended in the rise and development of the romantic school. Mr. W. S. Rockstro, the eminent English critic, and an advocate of the classic style, himself admits by inference that a change has been taking place in public sentiment in regard to oratorio when he asks certain questions in an article written for Grove's "Dictionary of Musicians," viz:—"Will the revolutionary spirit which is now working such radical changes in the constitution of the Opera affect the Oratorio also? Will the neglect of Counterpoint, the contempt for Fugue, the hatred of Polyphony, which so many young musicians—and not young ones only—are rapidly learning to regard as signs of progress, undermine the very foundations of sacred music to such an extent as to render the production of new and worthy works impossible?" It will be noted that Mr. Rockstro assumes that no "new and worthy" works are possible except on the old lines. "Chromaticus" says:—"The antiquatedness of Handel's style is most successfully set aside" by the success of the recent Birmingham Festival, at which the "Elijah" and the "Messiah" attracted the largest audiences. I really must say I fail to see how the success of the Birmingham Triennial Festival determines the style of Handel's music. In any case the profits of the recent festival were less than in 1873, when they reached nearly \$40,000; and the attendance was larger in 1876, having been 14,916. This year, moreover, the receipts for the "Elijah" exceeded those for the "Messiah." When the Birmingham festivals were first started, the programmes were devoted to Handel's music. Year by year the music of the old master has occupied less attention,

until now the subscribers are content if they get one work by Handel. It has to be remembered that the English are very slow to change their idols; and on the old oratorio nights the very best obtainable solo vocal talent is put forward. These two facts taken together have much to do in keeping the receipts up to a certain standard on these occasions. I still hold, however, that even in England Handel's music is becoming, slowly, if you will, but surely, less popular. In the United States the oratorio societies which work on the old conservative methods have a hard struggle for existence.

Miss Agnes Huntington seems to have been singularly unfortunate in the selection of the operas with which she has been on tour in America. One can find very little to say in favor of Planquette's "Captain Therese," which she and her company have been presenting at the Grand Opera House this week. Planquette seems to have worked out his vein of inspiration. "Captain Therese" is what is called a reminiscent opera, and what makes matters worse, it is reminiscent of a very poor class of tunes. The plot is dreadful rubbish, but that does not excuse the weak music, seeing that other composers have shown that they can write effectively even when embarrassed by an inferior libretto. Miss Huntington's popularity is, of course, great, but the public will soon become tired of having to swallow so much musical bitters for the sake of the small quantity of sweets which the favorite contralto can give them. I cannot say that Miss Huntington is surrounded by very talented associates; they are artists who, to use the evasive phrase of the professional journalist, give "adequate support," but do not for a moment divert interest from the star. This will not do, Miss Agnes; if you cannot give your patrons better value for their dollar and a-half seats, you had better marry and retire to the practical study of domestic economy. For the rest, it must be said that Miss Huntington has her opera attractively staged, both in regard to costumes and scenery, and her chorus does good average work. My impression is that when the week closes there will be no lingering desire in Toronto to hear anything more of "Captain Therese."

"The Tar and Tartar," which has been the opera at the Academy this week, owes its success to its comic business and to the excellence of the company. Marion Manola is a sweet and charming little singer, while as to Mr. and Mrs. Digby Bell and Hubert Wilke, are they not established favorites in this city?

The concert of the Toronto Vocal Society which occurred last week in the Pavilion Music Hall, was somewhat in the nature of a disappointment. There was not sufficient variety in the choral numbers, and with the public, excellence of performance will not reconcile them to sameness of style. To make up an effective programme is an art; and Mr. Buck

will do well to acquire its principles. On the night of the concert I heard some grumblers near me remark: "Why don't they give us the 'Sweet bye and-bye,' or some psalm tunes, while they are about it?" These words I think roughly echoed the feeling of a large part of the audience. The chorus, however, did some well-finished work, although the quality of tone produced was not equal to that of the Haslam Society. The soloists were Miss Fremstadt, mezzo-contralto, Mr. Victor Herbert, violoncello, and Miss Irene Gurney, pianist. Mr. Herbert is a very artistic player, with a round and sympathetic tone, and a well-trained left hand. The Servais "Souvenir de Spa," is a conventional concert piece of the "air with variations" class, and had no special interest. Mr. Herbert's best number was the Chopin "Nocturne," which he rendered with a fine singing tone, and with a pure style of expression, free from any attempt to vamp up the hectic sentimentality which many Chopin players affect. Miss Gurney is one of our most satisfactory piano soloists, and she has superior musical intelligence. The Chopin solo was, however, a little beyond her powers, and it would have been better if it had not been attempted. For many reasons the Chopin craze with which modern pianists are afflicted is to be regretted, but without specifying them, it should be admitted that pianists ought not to play in public the works of composers with whose style they are not in sympathy. The vocalist made a very favorable impression, and has evidently studied in a good school.

Mr. Fred. Boscovitz gave his second piano-recital last Monday evening in the Normal School theatre, in the presence of a select and fashionable gathering. The entertainment was called an "Evening with Chopin," and a very pleasant evening it proved to be. Mr. Boscovitz plays Chopin with a great deal of poetic insight and feeling; hence his success with his hearers.

MOORE'S MUSEE THEATRE.

Among the many excellent attractions which are constantly being brought before the public at Moore's Musee Theatre, there have been few of greater interest than the natty, witty little man who is to appear next week—Little Hop o' my Thumb. Hop o' my Thumb is in his eighteenth year but not much taller than a gentleman's silk dress hat. His twenty inches of height is made up of a symmetrical figure. He does not look dwarfish or out of proportion, and he is a miniature Apollo from the tops of his manly little head to the tips of his doll feet. Wherever Hop o' my Thumb has given public audiences, he has excited the most enthusiastic admiration of the mothers and children. The other attractions for New Year's week at the Musee Theatre are all of a high order of interest.

New Jersey girls have taken to wearing bells on their garters. They seem determined to make a noise in the world. It is not an original idea, however, for from time immemorial bells have been suspended from calves.