

## SABLE ISLAND.

THE falsely reported loss lately of an ocean steamer off Sable Island draws attention to that dangerous fragment of the Dominion, of which Mr. J. Macdonald Oxley furnishes some extremely interesting details in a short article called "An Ocean Graveyard," in the May number of *Scribner's Magazine*, from which the following details are extracted:

The island lies due east from Nova Scotia, at a distance of about eighty-five miles, between the forty-third and forty-fourth degrees of north latitude and the fifty-ninth of west longitude. Approaching it from the north, it appears to be a succession of low sand hills, thinly patched with straggling vegetation, having at the west end an elevation of some twenty feet, gradually rising to the eastward, until they attain the height of eighty feet near the east end light, beyond which they slope away again until they merge in the north-east bar. Its general shape is that of a long narrow crescent, measuring twenty-two miles from tip to tip, and one mile in breadth at its best.

The only good landing-place is on the north side, and even there the Government steamer, which forms the sole connecting link between the island and the outside world, can come no closer than a mile, and must keep a vigilant look out, so that on the first sign of a change of wind she may weigh anchor, and make an offing without delay. Sometimes old Ocean is at peace with himself, and the south wind blows softly. How rare an occurrence this is may be imagined from two entries in the superintendent's journal—one to the effect that there had not been five fine days in four months; the other that the steamer was eight days in trying to effect a landing, which must always be accomplished by means of one of the broad-beamed high-stemmed surf boats peculiar to the island. Disembarkation once achieved, there is a slight ascent to be surmounted, up which the walking in yielding sands is not easy. The summit attained, a short pass between two hummocks reveals a scene so utterly different from what has been anticipated that one is fain to wonder for a moment if it may not possibly be a mirage effect, or some ocular delusion. Before the observer lies a broad valley, completely shut in from the sea by hills which rise to right and left, and wave with a wealth of vegetation that is inexpressibly refreshing to eyes already wearied with the monotony of sand and sea. Ranged in an irregular square stand the buildings of the main station—the superintendent's spacious dwelling, flanked by quarters for the staff, boathouses, stores, and other outbuildings; while well filled barns and well stocked barn-yards lend an air of substantial comfort to the whole picture. From the foreground the eye roams over to the west end lighthouse, while nine miles farther down, a telescope makes plain the flag-staff at the foot of the lake, and five miles beyond that, the east end light with its attendant buildings. Herds of wild ponies, jealously guarded by shaggy stallions, graze upon the hillsides; black duck and sheldrake in tempting flocks paddle about the innumerable ponds, while sea birds fill the air with their harsh chatter, and whole regiments of seals bask in snug content along the beach. Here and there the bleaching ribs of naval skeletons protrude half-buried from the sand, and the whole picture is set in a silver-frosted frame of seething surf.

Since the founding of the Humane Establishment in 1802, a wreck register has been carefully kept, and on its pages may be read to-day the names of more than one hundred and fifty vessels that have come to their undoing on these fatal sands. It need hardly be said that even the tremendous total of one hundred and fifty wrecks falls short of representing the truth; on the contrary, for every one that is recorded at least one other never to be known may be safely added. After many a storm do the waves cast up at the patrolman's feet the evidence of some fresh disaster—a shattered spar, an empty hencoop, or perchance a bruised and battered corpse.

In order to give succour to the shipwrecked, and save such of their property as might not be destroyed, as well as to prevent as far as possible the occurrence of losses, the Canadian Government maintains two fine lighthouses and a fully equipped life-saving station at Sable Island. A staff of from eighteen to twenty men is steadily employed there; two life-boats built after the most approved fashion of the Royal National Life-boat Institution and a large despatch boat have been lately added. The men are regularly drilled in the management of the life-boats, and of the rocket apparatus, and complete telephone communication between the lighthouses and the different stations has been established, while a cable to the mainland is contemplated in the near future. So that, if it be not already, Sable Island will be soon a life-saving station whose equipment and capabilities cannot be excelled along the entire Atlantic coast. The Government steamer, *Newfield*, visits the island regularly on supply trips. The storms which beat upon this exposed strip of land are so violent that Sable Island is being submerged gradually, and is travelling besides eastward at such a rate that any chart of it, to be accurate, would need to be corrected every few years, hence the dangers of its navigation. It is safe to say that the latest chart obtainable by mariners is some miles at least out of the way. Since the beginning of this century the island has decreased in length from forty-two miles to twenty-two; in breadth, from two and one-fourth to something less than one; in height, from two hundred feet to eighty, while there has been a variation in the position of the west end of not less than twenty-five miles.

Slowly perhaps, yet none the less surely, and defying all attempts or devices of man to stay its advance, the time is coming when the victorious waves will fling their triumphant spray high over the last vestige of dry land, and the lights of Sable Island will no longer send their warning gleams across the fatal sands that will then even far more than ever merit the sorrow-laden title of "An Ocean Graveyard."

## THE LANGUAGE OF NATURE.

How healing this primeval waste!  
The racing river brings no haste,  
The travelling heavens have not effaced  
Time's spirit brooding here.

Strange that dumb crags and melting sky,  
That never knew mortality,  
Should heal the spirit through the eye,  
And bathe the soul in bliss.

Here all is still, vast, changeless, free!  
Heaven stoops in cloud, earth climbs to see;  
The language of eternity  
Alone is spoken here! —C. A. Fox.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

MENDELSSOHN.

To the Editor of THE WEEK:

SIR,—Some remarks in your issue of May 5th, under the head of "Music," and signed "Seranus," have prompted a few words as a rejoinder.

The ire of "Seranus" is aroused against a writer in the *New York Evening Post*, who asserts that the taste for Mendelssohn's music to-day is regarded very much as Mr. Howells regards Dickens. Apparently losing sight of the question at issue, that is, whether or not such is the case, "Seranus" seizes the opportunity of launching an unfair estimate of Mr. Howells' ability as a novelist. The *Evening Post* merely takes the latter's view of Dickens as an apt illustration of the manner in which Mendelssohn's music is regarded; and it is difficult to see any force in disproving his competency to judge of Dickens, even if done in a way at all convincing. "Seranus" is not convincing, but perhaps somewhat hasty and illogical. Having disposed of Howells, a vindication of Mendelssohn seems to suggest itself—the more easily in consequence—to the mind of "Seranus." There are a good many vague references to "connoisseurs," but one cannot help feeling that most of the remarks are based on a personal love of the composer's music.

Now, without reading the comments of the *Evening Post*, any person interested in musical productions must admit that Mendelssohn has not the prominence which he enjoyed in his own generation. Whether this will continue or not is another matter, but the fact is very stubborn.

Music is the outcome of the emotions either of individuals or of nations. The change in musical taste is the variation of the prominence of various emotions in men, and of all tastes nothing is so sensitive or more unaffected than the true musical one. The criticism—if indeed it can be called criticism—upon which it is founded, may often be faulty, just as the popular taste in other matters, but it never can be arbitrary. It is in this perhaps that music differs from and is greater than the other arts. Both to composer and audience must it ever be essentially vague. Except in the technique, it has no rules. Its essence—apart from all descriptive embellishments—is a direct appeal to self-consciousness. Self-consciousness has taken possession of our generation, and its result in any branch of art is analysis. Is it surprising, then, that the music which attracts in an age like ours, is and must needs be something more complex than that of Mendelssohn? There is a craving for a subtle and intellectual sensuousness, and that is most readily found in the works of musical masters of any age, who have sought to utter most deeply the mysteries of life.

But Mendelssohn's music, says "Seranus," "was made to last, not alone to please." That is an assertion merely. The composers whose compositions cover the widest range of emotions naturally will live the longest. Now, the characteristics of Mendelssohn, as a man, are contentedness, reverence, and purity, and these are faithfully transmitted to his works. In them we have a very charming peacefulness to soothe, and wonderful praise to God in a thousand utterances. All is hopeful and bright, but that is all. Pain and sorrow have scarcely an expression. There are no "confessions of weakness, and suffering, and despair," as "Seranus" contends. Mendelssohn then, though very perfect in his sphere, is, it is submitted, limited, and so is his audience at present.

The assault upon Dvorák and Brahms is almost as unmerited as that upon Mr. Howells. There are probably no two composers of the day who display such striking individualities, and to say that either of them have been "shown how" is unwarrantable and contrary to a very prevalent opinion.

"Seranus" concludes her musical comments by the most extraordinary statement. "No critic," she says, "of the highest order would but assign to Tennyson a higher place as a thinker than Browning."

From such a sentence one might suspect a conscientious study of the latter. The writer of this letter has no knowledge of critics who would place Tennyson higher as a thinker than Browning, but would be very willing to learn. Until "Seranus" will make good the above assertion, it will be held by nine-tenths of the readers of THE WEEK as most preposterous, and the remaining tenth will innocently swallow what is not good for them.

Yours,

G. F. B.

Toronto, 9th May, 1887.