

MUSIC AND THE DRAMA.

THE event of the past month in the dramatic world of Toronto was, of course, the production, for the first time in Canada, we believe, of Shakspeare's 'Cymbeline,' with Miss Neilson as Imogen. The reasons why this play, which in many respects is quite worthy of its author, is so seldom produced on the modern stage are not far to seek. One of these is that the plot turns upon an incident which is of rather too strong a flavor to agree with the delicate, not to say squeamish, stomachs of modern audiences. Another is that the drama as a whole labours under the incurable defect that the latter half is much weaker than the first, and, consequently, comes after it as an anti-climax. The melodrama and sensationalism of the last two acts are but poor substitutes for the strong human interest which runs through the first three. In his creation of *Imogen*, however, Shakspeare has given another proof of his marvellous power in depicting feminine nature; and the character is so strikingly beautiful that it will no doubt, in the future as in the past, be the means of bringing the play upon the stage from time to time, as affording a fresh opportunity for display to an actress capable of taking advantage of it, such as Miss O'Neil, Miss Helen Faucit, Miss Tree, —and we may now add, Miss Neilson. Not that Miss Neilson's impersonation is a thoroughly satisfactory one—far from it. She has appeared in the part on only about half-a-dozen occasions, a public experience quite inadequate to enable her to identify herself with the character as she has identified herself with Juliet and Rosalind. The consequence is that her performance does not give one the idea of a complete and consistent personality; we have before us, not the *Imogen* of Shakspeare, but Miss Neilson acting *Imogen*. The impression is similar to that which one gets when looking at an unfinished portrait. The firm, free lines betokening the great artist, are there; but the want of completeness gives an air of crudeness to the general result. Moreover, Miss Neilson's conception of the character is occasionally at fault; particularly in the scene where she enters the cave. The strong element of comedy which the actress infuses into this episode is neither to be found in the text, nor is it in keeping with the painful circumstances in which *Imogen* finds herself placed.

During her brief visit Miss Neilson also played *Juliet*, *Rosalind*, and *Julia*, in 'The Hunchback.' In this last character Miss Neilson is unapproachable. Of the numerous actresses who have played the part in Toronto,

not one is worthy to be mentioned in the same breath with her. Mrs. Rousby comes nearest; but at what an interval! Whether in the idyllic beauty of the first act, or in the supreme pathos of the later ones, the actress is equally at home, equally admirable. For exquisite refinement, purity, and depth of feeling we doubt if a more nearly perfect impersonation can be witnessed on the stage to-day. *Indeed*, it was not all acting, as the tears on the face of the actress more than once testified. Miss Neilson's *Julia*, in short, deserves to be placed on the same pedestal with her *Juliet*,—that is, making allowance for the fact that the latter is a far more difficult and trying character to act. Of the recent performance of this last it is only necessary to say that it was repeated in the same mutilated version—with one of the finest scenes cut out—as on the occasion of Miss Neilson's previous visit this season.

The *Posthumus* of Mr. Plympton, the young actor who accompanied Miss Neilson, was not one of his happiest efforts. Though in general spirited and intelligent, it was so demonstrative at times as to become almost boisterous. The substitution of a little repose and dignity would have been a considerable gain. In *Romeo* he showed decided improvement, even in the short time which has elapsed since his appearance two months ago. But his best character was unquestionably *Clifford*, in the "Hunchback," a thoroughly manly, dignified, and natural performance. In 'Cymbeline,' Mr. Fitzgerald's *Iachimo* was a tolerably effective picture of the wily Italian, though he spoilt the bed-chamber scene by pitching his voice so low as to be quite inaudible at a little distance. Mr. Gregory's *Cloten* was a capital bit of comedy, which would have been better had the actor known his lines.

Of the other plays given at the Grand Opera House during the month, the only ones calling for particular remark are 'Ours,' and 'Our Boys.' Mr. Robertson's military drama was appropriately given on the occasion of the benefit of the Queen's Own Rifles. Mr. Fitzgerald was excellent as *Hugh Chalcott*, except that in the last act he seemed to have been slightly discomposed by a visit from St. Vitus, so perpetually was he on the move; and Mrs. Morrison went through her drill, and made her Irish stew with even more than her accustomed spirit and 'go.' 'Our Boys' was given at Mr. Hudson's benefit, and the only feature of it calling for remark was that gentleman's humorous and natural performance as old *Middlewick*.