

Musical & Dramatic Notes.

BY VIOLA.

The orchestral music supplied at the Toronto theatres often causes unfavorable comment from visitors from other cities, and is a constant source of annoyance to the regular patrons of these houses who have cultivated musical tastes. The composition of the orchestra at the Grand Opera House is not of a character that one has a right to expect at a first-class theatre, and the music that is played is for the most part of the most trashy description. It is a notorious fact that when opera is produced here by a visiting company, the accompaniments are so mangled that the singers are often seriously interfered with, and the effect of their best numbers ruined. In many operas, particularly those of the modern school, the orchestra often fills as important a part as the singers, while in the enforcement of the dramatic situation it is occasionally paramount. Even in the comic operas of Gilbert & Sullivan a complete and effective orchestra is necessary for their effective performance. Yet how rarely do we hear the score reproduced in the form given it by the composer. First one part is missing and then another—here, a beautiful little melody for the violoncello, then a charming bit for the oboe or a few soft bars for the horns. To have the missing "leads" thumped out on a jingly pianoforte, as is often done by a too energetic conductor, is musically speaking adding insult to injury. When the first violin should rise triumphantly above the orchestra, perhaps singing a passionate love theme, as in "Faust," or vividly depicting the moaning of the wind and fury of the storm, as in "The Flying Dutchman," one hears nothing but some indistinct wheezy sound in the one case, and a series of inarticulate squeaks in the other. The cornet, trombone and side-drum reign supreme in our orchestras. The public are greatly to blame for this state of things, for they have allowed theatre managers to believe that they care little what kind of music is served up to them. They have indeed given good ground for the belief. How often has it occurred when a good orchestra has been brought here with opera, that the overture and *entr'acte* music have been seized upon as convenient opportunities for a discussion upon the fashions between Mrs. Jones and Mrs. Smith, or a heated controversy upon politics between Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones. I have referred to the Grand Opera House because it is at present our representative theatre. The orchestra there should be strengthened and re-arranged. There should at least be two first violins and two second, instead of one of each as at present. A violoncello is indispensable, and if possible an oboe and two horns should be added. We should then have a nice compact little orchestra, capable of performing with very fair effect ordinary overtures and operatic selections. I do not intend to reflect upon the individual players of our orchestras, but am simply condemning the system which has allowed the present state of things to continue so long

Now that I am on the subject of orchestral players, it will be in order to touch upon a matter

which has been causing a good deal of talk among the profession. About four years ago, a number of the players at the theatres met and organised a union called "The Toronto Orchestral Association." The object of the "combine" was stated to be "to unite the instrumental portion of the musical profession for the better protection of its interests in general, and the establishment of a minimum rate of prices to be charged by members of said Association for their professional services, and the enforcement of good faith and fair dealing between its members." So far, so good; the object seemed a desirable one, although I must say the last part of the "article" might be taken to bear the inference that "good faith and fair dealing" were not commonly practised in certain circles of the profession. The Association soon numbered on its list of members nearly all the instrumental musicians of the city, and even such prominent teachers as Messrs. Torrington, D'Auria, Edward Fisher and John Bayley thought it well to join in the movement. Unfortunately success did not bring wisdom, and in the arbitrary enforcement of its rules the Executive Committee has made the Association extremely unpopular. Section I of Article III. provides that "it shall be the duty of every member to refuse to perform in any orchestra in which any person or persons are engaged to perform who are not members." For a violation of this section a fine of \$2 is imposed for the first offence, \$5 for the second, while for the third offence the punishment is expulsion. It seems almost incredible, but we are told that the Board of Directors have interpreted this article to apply to the orchestras of amateur societies like the Philharmonic and Choral, and have also so defined the term "orchestra" as to include small parties of from three to six players. In other words, they have endeavored to discourage and prevent the association of professionals with amateurs and non-members at performances of every description. The effect of this enforcement of the rule has been to limit the earning powers of the members, and consequently to cause grave dissatisfaction. In many cases persons and societies who might have been able to engage a limited number of professionals have had to dispense with them altogether. After what I said last week, I am not likely to be accused of favoring the amateurs, but I must confess that so far as music is concerned the suppression of the amateur will mean starvation to a large proportion of the profession. Another rule provides that a certain fee must be charged for attendance at every rehearsal for an oratorio performance or orchestral concert in addition to the amount charged for the public performance. This rule would not be unreasonable if the members of the Association were all efficient executants and could play their parts after two or three rehearsals. It is unhappily the case, with but few exceptions, that the members of the union require almost as many rehearsals as the amateurs, and it can easily be calculated that if the rehearsal fees are rigidly insisted upon, an orchestra must become too expensive for the finances of our oratorio societies to sustain. I should not be surprised if the union falls to pieces within a few months from disaffection from within and from without its ranks. The Board of Direc-

tors will do well if like sensible men they reconsider the situation, and recognise the fact that circumstances alter cases, and that any attempt to apply the rigid musical "unionism" of New York to this city must result in an injury to the profession here.

THEN AND NOW.

WINTER.

W. SHAKESPEARE, (BORN 1564, DIED 1616.)

When icicles hang by the wall,
And Dick the shepherd blows his nail,
And Tom bears logs into the hall,
And milk comes frozen home in pail,
When blood is nipt, and ways be foul,
When nightly sings the staring owl
Tuw-hoo!
Tuw-hit! tuw-hoo! a merry note!
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

When all around the wind doth blow,
And coughing drowns the parson's saw,
And birds sit brooding in the snow,
And Marian's nose looks red and raw;
When roasted crabs hiss in the bowl—
Then nightly sings the staring owl
Tuw-hoo!
Tuw-hit! tuw-hoo! a merry note!
While greasy Joan doth keel the pot.

BRITISH SPARROWS.

BY ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN.

Over the dripping roofs and sunk snow-burrows
The bells are ringing loud and strangely near,
The shout of children din upon mine ear
Shrilly, and like a flight of silvery arrows
Showers the sweet gossip of the British sparrows,
Gathered in noisy knots of one or two,
To joke and chatter just as mortals do
Over the day's long tale of joys and sorrows:
Talk before bed-time of bold deeds together,
Of thefts and flights, of hard times and the weather,
Till sleep disarms them, to each little brain
Bringing tucked wings and many a blissful dream—
Visions of wind and sun, of field and stream,
And busy barn-yards with their scattered grain.

MR. "PHIL." ROBINSON.

Mr. Phil. Robinson, the special correspondent of the London *Times*, spoke in the following plain manner to a Canadian journalist during his recent visit here:—"I am extremely sorry to see how badly the papers here are served by the telegraph. I can't understand why men of such ability as are the editors of the different papers in the west of the Dominion, submit to the dictation of vulgar and malignant Yankees, who recognise the value of the press as a means of misdirecting the opinions of the rising generation on all public questions. If I were in the witness-box, and on my oath, I think I could put my finger, in three guesses, on the American who dictates and controls the garbled versions not only of European but often of Eastern Canadian news that reach the West. That an American's facts should be untrustworthy goes without saying, when those facts concern English politics, but it seems a pity that Canada should conspire with the States to disseminate these reports, injurious alike to the honor of Great Britain and to the welfare of her noblest colony." Few readers of Canadian journals will say that this is one whit exaggerated.