

THE CHURCH SPIDER.

BY ALICE CLARK.

Two spiders, so the story goes,
Upon a living bent,
Entered the meeting-house one day,
And hopefully were heard to say,
"Here we shall have at least fair play,
With nothing to prevent."

Each chose his place, and went to work.
The light webs grew apace:
One on the sofa spun his thread,
But shortly came the sexton dead.
And swept him off, and so, half dead,
He sought another place.

"I'll try the pulpit next," said he.
"There surely is a prize;
The desk appears so neat and clean.
I'm sure no spider there has been;
Besides, how often have I seen
The pastor brushing flies!"

He tried the pulpit, but alas!
His hopes proved visionary:
With dusting-brush the sexton came,
And spoilt his geometric game,
Nor gave him time nor space to claim
The right of sanctuary.

At length, half-starved and weak and lean,
He sought his former neighbor,
Who now had grown so sleek and round.
He weighed the fraction of a pound,
And looked as if the art he'd found
Of living without labor.

"How is it, friend," he asked, "that I
Endured such thumps and knocks,
While you have grown so very gross?"
"This plain," he answered, "not a loss
I've met since first I spun across
The contribution box."

MUSICAL CRITICISM.

To the Editor of the CANADIAN ILLUSTRATED NEWS.

SIR,—The critiques upon the various musical performances given here from time to time which appear in the columns of the different city journals, are so extraordinary in many ways, and I think exert so undesirable an influence upon those who read them, that I cannot refrain from troubling you with a few words of comment upon them.

In order to be as brief as possible let me classify the writers of these critiques, and in doing so, it will be found that they are, as nearly as may be, susceptible of being grouped under three heads, namely: The grandiloquent, the gushingly laudatory and the profoundly ignorant.

The grandiloquent critic is a rarer bird than some of his fellows; nevertheless he deserves special mention. He will be readily detected by a peculiarity of improving every possible occasion for an allusion by name to the great players and singers he has heard, and of proclaiming to his readers how very forcibly the performer or performers under review remind him of them. He has, also, a liberal stock of musical phrases, either in Italian or French, at his command, which he intersperses freely through his articles, giving them (to adopt his own manner) a *distiqué* or *recherché* style, and impressing his readers with a sense of his knowledge as well as ability. He sometimes find fault, but, for the most part, is easily pleased, and that, too, at a time when a better informed critic would not be so well satisfied. An aria from Mozart may be sung, or a solo from Chopin, Vieuxtemps or (it's all one to him) Beethoven played in the most contemptible manner; they are received with the utmost graciousness by this talented listener, and his notice, next morning, abounds in high-sounding platitudes, profusely larded with technical phrases and (apparently) analytical researches, which set the public all agape, and forever stop the mouths of those grumblers who were foolish enough to imagine the performance an execrable one.

The gushing critic goes deeper down into the affections, and touches the most adamant heart. Of course he ventures quite beyond his depth whenever he attempts a serious sentence on the subject of music. A fair performance of an Offenbach overture (not the highest order of music certainly) has, according to him, kept the audience "in a trance of continuous delight." A duet for two violins, played not remarkably well, although by no means badly, is "as fine an exhibition of violin music as it has ever been our lot to hear," and this, with the magnificent strains of Wieniawski, Prume and Sauret still sounding in his ears.

It is, however, only when a lady singer comes to the front that our critic is in his element. With what rhapsody he eulogizes her appearance! "Her great musical eyes," her lips, her teeth, her hair! Nothing escapes him. What elegance of toilette, what perfection and grace in every movement! What genius in every look! What pathos in every sound! And then the voice! Of course "what little nature has left unfinished, art," &c., &c. Here is a pretty conceit: "Every low, sweet note she utters, each softly modulated cadence, and above all the deep expression and feeling that are conveyed in every thrilling tone, impress the listener with the idea that she is one with whom music has become an intense passion, too intense to be restrained, and so given forth to the world in all its perfection." The innocent subject of this enthusiastic burst is not Nilsson, nor Lucca, nor Patti, nor any of the great lyric artists of this or any other day, but a very unpretentious young lady whose repertoire is made up chiefly of ordinary English songs which she sings in a most unimpassioned manner, and with as little expression or poetic fire as any public singer who has appeared among us this many a day.

Another characteristic of this writer is his generous lenity toward all performances of whatever merit. "Where all was so excellent it

would be invidious," &c., is the keynote of everything he writes. To discriminate between what is good and what is bad one could naturally imagine to be quite within the province of a critic. But the gusher does nothing of this sort. An amateur sings a song a quarter of a tone below pitch and with an entire absence of all style or conception of the composer's meaning; a month later an artist like Maurel or Lucca sings the same song as it should be sung. A comparison of the two notices which followed the respective performances would lead one to infer that the atrocious attempt of the amateur was rather the better rendering of the two. An amateur orchestra essays a Beethoven overture, and creates a jargon of discordant confusion as vigorous as it is distracting, and straightway it is blazoned abroad that "last evening the Philharmonic," (or Musical Union, or any other name you prefer) "performed the magnificent overture to 'Egmont' in a masterly manner, and were listened to with breathless attention by a rapt and spell-bound audience." A vocal society whose members have labored long and with assiduous intelligence to perfect themselves in the interpretation of music of the highest rank, performs choice selections in a very excellent and praise-worthy manner, showing care, culture and good taste on the part of all of them. Next day the fact is announced in the usual gushing style, and the society encouragingly informed that the public opinion of the results of its ten or twelve years' hard work is "sweetly pretty!"

The profoundly ignorant critic, however, is the gem of the genus. The two former types are ignorant, of course, but they have a smattering of musical knowledge, and manage to make it pass for so much more than it is really worth, that the public swallows their utterances with the greatest avidity. But the individual who occasionally undertakes to "do" a musical notice for one of the newspapers of the city is the most undaunted of all our staff of scribblers. He expresses his opinions with the easiest confidence and assurance, and does not hesitate to differ with anybody and everybody. He speaks of the "Jubilee Singers" who were here a while ago—an organization remarkable, indeed, when one reflects that its members are liberated slaves, but, judged by a musical standard, very rude and uncouth in its character—as being the best-trained and most highly finished "orchestra" (!) that ever visited the city! In noticing one of the concerts recently given here by the Beethoven Quintette Club, assisted by Mrs. Osgood, soprano singer, he informs his readers, that, owing to the illness of that lady, which prevented her from taking part in the performance, the latter was entirely musical in its character! Coming from anyone else this remark would have been received as a pretty severe slur upon Mrs. Osgood; but from the well-known ability of the writer to say absurd things in the most blissfully unconscious manner, it passed for a good joke, and was enjoyed by no one, probably, more than by the lady herself.

I might fill a column with citations of this sort, but I forbear. Enough has been said, I think, to show with what cool assurance, people who know little or nothing about the art of music rush into print with their views upon musical subjects; people, too, who would never dream of thus boldly proclaiming their opinions upon any other subject with which they are so little acquainted. But the popular idea seems to be that a knowledge of music comes intuitively like the act of breathing, and requires neither study, thought, nor experience. If a person with more than ordinary musical tendencies has sufficient ability to strum a little on a piano or sing in a church choir, there will be plenty of admiring friends to do him worship and magnify him into a musical authority; and in many instances the individual readily believes that he is an authority. This extraordinary peculiarity, however, never manifests itself among the votaries of other arts and sciences. To speak authoritatively about poetry, painting, architecture, botany, astronomy or other kindred subjects, demands a previous preparation for the position assumed,—a preparation which shall have consisted of thoughtful, systematic study and intelligent investigation. But no such preparation is exacted by even an educated public when musical matters are in review. Let there be an unlimited supply of self-assurance on the part of the writer, and very little else is necessary. The public exercises no discrimination, and, although it may know better, accepts the senseless commonplaces with a smile, and meekly bows before the self-constituted tribunal. So when one of these musical ignoramus, who does not know a minor third from a dominant seventh, rushes into print and boldly ventilates his musical opinions, the public only shrugs its shoulders at the stupid absurdities, and waits patiently for the next instalment of the same sort.

It strikes me that this has gone far enough, and that lovers of music, as well listeners as performers, are entitled to something better than the bombast with which, for the most part, they are regaled in our newspapers after every musical performance that takes place here. When a critic sneers at "classical music," and at the same time ranks Verdi with Mozart among classical writers; or calls eight or ten singers an "orchestra;" or betrays his utter ignorance, by not even knowing the difference between an "instrumental" and a "vocal" concert; or lauds the singing of a public artist, and speaks of her wonderful "manipulation of the scale" (polite for vocal execution, I suppose); or shows in a hundred other equal ridiculous and preposterous ways how thoroughly unfit he is for the task he has undertaken; when, I say,

a person calling himself a critic does not hesitate to do all this and a great deal more besides, it is high time that those among us who do know a little something about music should raise our voices in earnest protest against such unblushing presumption and self-complacency. If the city papers cannot afford to employ competent men to write their musical notices, let them, at least, abstain from bringing into ridicule so much of the art as exists among us, by withholding from publication the twaddle which makes up so large a part of the so-called musical reviews that appear in our journals, and which furnish such unceasing amusement to well-informed readers both at home and abroad. If they can do nothing to advance art, let them, at all events, not help to make it ridiculous.

Your obedient servant,

Montreal, Feb., 12, 1875.

CRITIQUE.

RANDOM SKETCHES ON THE ROAD.

BY A CANADIAN COMMERCIAL.

Jack Frost at Niagara Falls.

CLIFTON, Feb. 14th.—To see the great cataract only in summer is not to half see it. Then unimpeded and undisputed, the majestic river bears its mighty tribute of waters from the lakes above, and rolls thus onward in never-ceasing, never-changing volume to the dizzy brink of the precipice, where they drop in one vast flood into the abyss of mist and churning foam and babbling, seething waters beneath, there to gather together again and spring away from momentary captivity, the same mighty, resistless flood as ever. Resistless it seems, but go there in winter time, and you will find a power at work that can stem even a Niagara. Quietly, steadily but surely, working day and night, and knowing no cessation, the frost, more powerful in its subtle influence than even this greatest of nature's works, encroaches every day, every hour, every minute, on the chafing torrent.

Hearing that a sight of the Falls this winter was well worth a walk of a mile, I strolled up the river bank this morning, and was rewarded by a sight I would not have missed had the walk been ten times the distance. It was a magnificent morning for such a walk and such a scene—a clear, bracing atmosphere, with a cloudless sky above and the sun pouring down its rays on the snow-enveloped ground with such dazzling effect as to make it absolutely painful to the sight. Immediately above the new or upper Suspension Bridge, I came in full view of the American Falls. The river between was frozen completely over, and numbers were crossing and re-crossing on the rough, jagged ice, the uneven surface giving evidence of the fearful speed and power of the rapids beneath. The appearance of this, the lesser Fall, is awfully grotesque. Only the upper portion of the Fall, when it rolls over the precipice, can be seen, for the heavy spray, as it rises on the air, congeals with the intense cold, and this process, continued from day to day, has resulted in the formation of several gigantic ice-bergs or ice mountains, that completely screen the great body of the Fall from view. The two largest are immense cone-shaped mounds, but there are a number of lesser bergs that are most fantastic in shape and outline, and all are white as the spray and mist that created them. Viewed from the Canada side, they resemble miniature volcanoes or immense geysers, and as the heavy volumes of thick white mist rise above them and settle again on their summits, it requires no stretch of the imagination to fancy that their craters are belching clouds of hot steam and wreaths of blinding smoke. Then, in the very centre of the Fall, where the volume of water is greatest, it has either burst its icy barriers, or never allowed them to close, for a fierce and turbulent stream rushes between two of the icy volcanoes with a volume and impetuosity that will not brook restraint. This, from where I stood, was all that could be seen of the broad sheet of water which far above rolled and raged, and tumbled over its rocky bed. The course of the great volume of water was hidden from view by barriers of its own creation. Crossing with some few others to the American side, I succeeded, after a great deal of toil in the way of climbing, and a great deal of tribulation in the way of back-sliding and hand-scratching, in reaching the summit of the lesser Mont Blanc, and here the mystery of the disappearance of the cataract was revealed, and I found that what from the Canada side looked like an obstruction to its fall, was only a mask erected by it, as I could fancy, in a fit of jealousy to hide its beauty and its grandeur from the prying eye of man. The scene from the elevation was awful in its sublimity. The thick, heavy masses of beaten spray, freezing as they rose, fell on us and about us in a shower of fine glistening flakes of snow; the solemn roar of the waters filled my ears with a deep sense of the pigmy power of boasting man contrasted with the mighty work of our and its Creator. But the wonderful beauty of the American Fall is eclipsed by the incomparable grandeur of its greater Canadian brother, and is but a paltry mill-dam in comparison. Excepting at the two outermost edges of this vast cataract, where the weight and strength of the waters decrease, no insolent iceberg dares to rear its crest and bid defiance to its power. From the boiling, seething cauldron beneath, a vast cloud of vapoury mist rises and shrouds the great whirlpool in eternal mystery. The keen, wintry air freezes and whitens this mist to the very brink of the cataract, and the strife of falling waters behind the snowy veil is completely hidden from view. Beaten, broken and cleft into a

million torrents by its stupendous fall, the river stops for an instant, whirls round and round a thousand times, recovers itself, and rushes madly on till stemmed by the icy barrier that has been growing and growing, and gaining strength so slowly but so certainly below. Vainly striving to bear away this frosty bulwark, it at length abandons the fruitless effort, and sullenly finds its course and vents its wrath beneath. But what tongue can tell or pen depict the awful grandeur, the sublimity, the dread power of the great cataract at any time? And if, in describing or depicting these, the feeble tongue or hand of man should palsy, how fruitless the task to describe the weird and wondrous majesty and beauty the icy arms of winter lend to the scene as he woos his watery bride. As the sun sets and the pale cold moon of a February night climbs up into the heavens, the heavy mist is weaved with glistening threads of silvery light. The wreaths of climbing vapour assume strange shapes that mock us with their likeness to the varied forms of life that meet us in our daily walks. Can these weird creatures of the fog and cloud be the wraiths of those who have gone over the falls, and whose bodies, they say, have never been recovered? Can these poor ghosts be mourning over their earthly tenements buried in the dark abyss beneath, and doomed so to mourn till that great day when even Niagara shall surrender its dead? But a cloud has passed over the moon, and darkness settles over the earth. All outlines on the banks grow indistinct, but the heavy whiteness of the ice-mounds and the rising clouds of mist show painfully distinct through the gathering gloom. The ceaseless, changeless, roar of Niagara, like to no sound but its own, beats heavy on my ears. The earth and all its myriad millions may slumber; Niagara never slumbers. Who can say when it shall?

THE PROTECTOR OF NILSSON.

A Florence correspondent of the St. Louis *Globe* writes: "From my seat at the head of the table—which I hold as having been the longest at the pension—I can secure the whole length of the table, and see many interesting characters. At my left hand sits a Swelish Baroness, a lady whom I have never known for an instant sad or discontented, but who is always cheerful and happy, seemingly with every wish gratified. The first evening she sat beside me she told me with most justifiable pride that Nilsson was her protégée. A friend of hers had heard Nilsson singing at a country fair when only twelve or thirteen; he had admired her voice, and, knowing the Baroness devoted to music, brought Nilsson to her. She was so much pleased with her evident talent that she urged the friend with whom she was then living, to take her and they would instruct her together. This her friend consented to do, and they educated her in every way, teaching her manners as well as the necessary branches of learning, as she was entirely ignorant of all usages of the world, since she had before that time been brought up simply as a peasant. She was very quick at learning, especially in languages and most diligent and ambitious. At the end of about two years, the Baroness took her to Paris and left her there in an English boarding-school, where she took lessons six months with the other scholars, and was then put under Waechel's care, and studied with him for three years and a half, the Baroness going yearly to inspect her progress. In the school where Nilsson stayed during all this time she was greatly beloved, and long before leaving Paris became quite the polished lady; yet, although glad to renounce all peasantisms in manners, she never would, in the midst of all her numerous studies, relinquish her favorite amusement of carving wood, which she did with great skill. While she was in Paris she met M. Rouzaud, and, as every one knows, although she could have married any one she chose in England, she preferred her French fiancé, and is now, they say, his happy wife."

THE ELECTRICAL GIRL.

We read in the last number of the *Popular Science Monthly*:

In the beginning of 1846, a year memorable in the history of table-turning and spirit-rapping, Angélique Cotton was a girl of fourteen, living in the village of Bouvigny, near La Perrière, department of Orne, France. She was of low stature, but of robust frame, and apathetic to an extraordinary degree both in body and mind. On January 15th of the year named, while the girl was with three others engaged in weaving silk-thread gloves, the oaken table at which they worked began to move and change position. The work-women were alarmed; work was for a moment suspended, but was soon resumed. But, when Angélique again took her place, the table began anew to move with great violence; she felt herself attracted to it, but, as soon as she touched it, it retreated before her, or was even upset. The following morning similar phenomena were observed; and before long public opinion was very decided in affirming that Angélique Cotton was possessed of a devil, and that she should be brought before the parish priest. But the curé was a man of too much common-sense to heed their request for an exorcism, and resolved to see the facts for himself. The girl was brought to the curé's house, and there the phenomena were repeated, though not with the same intensity as before: the table retreated, but was not overturned, while the chair on which Angélique was seated moved in a contrary direction, rocking the while, and giving Angélique great difficulty in keeping her seat.