

Music.

(Written Specially for "FAIR PLAY" by W. B. Cadzow.)

MUSICAL NOVELS.

There are, among the many who take up the study of music, and the many more who take an interest in the art, a host who desire to be fed on sentimentality, and imagine that it is one of the fittest adjuncts of tonal work. These misguided ones never hear a beautiful musical work without desiring at once to know "its story," and they imagine that to every such composition there must be joined some personal anecdote. It is to this large but misguided public that the musical novel is generally addressed. It gives them every possible anecdote regarding musical compositions and their creation, and where no such anecdotes exist, it invents them. The influence is a most baneful one. Pure music can be enjoyed without any knowledge of the circumstances of its production. But if after learning a noble composition, one desires to study its history, and something of the composer, at least one should seek for the original truth, and not allow fancy to run riot. The chief fault to be found with most musical novels is that they mix truth with fiction in extricable confusion. "Charles Auchester" is a type of such a school of writing, and has done probably as much harm as any quasi-musical work ever written. Musical students imagine a vague Mendelssohn and an impossible Joachim after mooning over its pages. Yet worse are those "Musical Sketches," which give a false history of a special work, for they prevent a proper performance and a correct appreciation of the particular composition of which they treat. Beethoven, for example, wrote his opus 27, No. 2, as a sonata in the free style of a fantasia. He had no thought of an especial romance, no regular and precise story to convey, but allowed the music to exert its true function, and stimulate each one who heard it to poetic ideas and beautiful thoughts. That each auditor should wreath some different dream or weave some different train of thought around it, was natural and proper, for people draw thoughts from music only in proportion to their own natures. But there comes along the musical romancer, and at once writes out a story of the "Moonlight Sonata," and brings in a blind girl, a forest in the moonlight, and heaven knows what other theatrical and sensational adjuncts, and the deed is done. Henceforth the noble army of musical gushers will rhapsodize about the work chiefly because of the sentimental tale. The story will be first, the music second, in their shallow pates ever after, and when a pianist like the late Von Bülow confirms their romanticism by playing the work with the lights turned down they imagine that they have "confirmation strong as Holy Writ."

THE MESSIAH.

I sometimes hear it said that Handel is out of fashion now, and that the Messiah is meagre and monotonous, and some of the orchestra complain that it is "too easy for anything." How can that which is pregnant with the deepest mysteries of life and death, that is the means of awakening pity, love, loyalty, and worship, be called meagre? And how can that which sings of the golden glory of the world's crowning day, of the purity and simplicity of a perfected life, of noontide darkness and accumulated and concentrated pain, and of victory and restored glory, be monotonous? Then, as for the orchestration being too easy, even Mozart's instrumentation of the Messiah is not so easy, but that it is often badly played. I have no desire to dethrone Wagner; he is secure, and his throne is a radiant one.

Beethoven is immovable, and his kingdom is a boundless one. But dear old Handel, as long as the Christian world exists, must occupy his position, the most exalted of all. The force of his genius broke through the despotism of contrapuntal law, and in his exultant freedom he sang his "Hallelujahs."

The Messiah transcends all other oratorios in the solidity of its framework; the bright, healthful glow of its coloring, its simplicity, its tenderness, its strength, and majestic tread of its movements. There may yet be more Beethovens, Wagners, Schumanns, Schuberts, but there will never be another Handel.

WAGNER AS A CONDUCTOR.

As the light of the moon is eclipsed by the brilliancy of sun-

light, so Wagner, the conductor, is overshadowed by Wagner the composer. We hear little about the marvellous skill of this wonderful man in the management of his forces, and yet it was marvellous, and when employed in the interpretation of his own works, wrought a revelation not soon to be forgotten by those who heard. In 1871 Wagner directed the performance of his "Eine Faust Overture," at the Berlin Opera House, where the work was one of the numbers on the programme of a complimentary concert given the composer. Julius Stern and Heinrich Thadewalt were the directors, but at the close of the overture, which was finely rendered, Wagner begged the musicians to repeat the number and asked for the privilege of conducting.

At first there was a slight wavering on the part of the players, it was a little out of the usual order of things, this public performance with no rehearsal, but not many measures were played before the most perfect harmony was established between conductor and players. Then what a world of light and truth was opened up to the listener! The "Eine Faust Overture" had been a delight to the audience, but it was now given to them in its perfection of coloring, and movements, and Wagner's ease in conducting was a marvel to all present. There were no vehement gestures, no circuitous swings, but an almost unnoticeable movement except in very important passages. Changes of tempi were passed over with remarkable smoothness. Only in the crescendo to a climax would the conductor yield to marked emotion, and then he carried his forces with him with a power that was irresistible.

MUSICAL CRITICISM.

An old Harper's Weekly, January 28rd, 1892 contains an excellent article on "The Modern Orchestra" by H. E. Krehbiel. The article opens with the statement that music is, of all arts, "practiced most and thought about least." It is a remark which leads to an investigation of the cause of this truth. Mr. Krehbiel inclines to the belief that something is wrong with the system of musical instruction. Also true! But who has the greatest and most influence on the public in general, the music-teacher or the public voice—the press? Certainly the latter. How many journals, however, have on their staff a musical critic who has the ability to influence the general public towards a higher respect for the musical art? The influence is usually the reverse. Musical criticism is in most cases attended to by the football or society reporter; or occasionally the gentleman writing the editorial articles takes a hand in it, as was the case on a certain occasion after the first performance of the St. Mathew Passion of Bach. The gist of his criticism of the grand work was that as the passion music had been first brought out by Mendelssohn in 1830, after lying on the shelf for a hundred years, he hoped that it would again be shelved for a hundred years. If such an opinion is boldly propounded in an editorial of an influential daily, what must the result be on the public? What use of festivals? What use of musical instruction? The respect for the lofty in art is not enhanced but lowered. Art is ridiculed, is considered a plaything for musical cranks, or an amusement for sentimentalists. In the opinion of the press in general, music does not stand on a level with the drama by far now. Is it possible under such condition that those studying music, much less the public, will be induced to think about the art? Where are they to get a fair impartial opinion regarding the merits of an artist, or an art production? Who is to assist them to think? Surely the instructor is not always present. Taken for granted that such is not the mission of a daily journal, why can we not have a musical department in our weeklies? Among the newspaper men of New Zealand surely there are some who have the ability and enthusiasm required to fill the position of editor of a musical department. A thorough musician is hardly the person for such a position, but a practical man, one who understands the demands of the readers of such papers, would be able to do more good, in the direction of public interest, in the musical art than scores of professional musicians. Let us have an interesting analysis of the latest art work, the latest literary work, the tendency of modern art. Give us something for the intellect. Let us speak more to the intellect than the feeling, and the people of New Zealand will compete with the Germans in musical appreciation.

(To be continued).