

A TRIUMPH FOR IRISH GENIUS.

UNDER the caption "Symphonic Poem by a Woman," The *Trans-Atlantic* gives this charming sketch of Mme. Augusta Holmes' latest achievement:—

The city of Paris, which, although republican, is decidedly a royal hostess, began on September 11, the celebration of the festival of the Republic in the central nave of the Palais de l'Industrie, transformed into an immense theatre for the purpose. The programme consisted of three performances, on the 11th, 14th, and 16th, of the symphonic poem, "Ode Triomphale," the words and music of which were written for the occasion by Augusta Holmes, a French composer of Irish descent. The presentation was on so magnificent a scale that each performance cost sixty thousand dollars. The entrance was free, and the combined audience reached the number of sixty-six thousand. The first performance was for President Carnot, the authorities, and the Press; the second was for the children, and the third for the people.

Never was so large a theatre constructed in so short a time. The stage is 146 feet wide and 143 feet deep.

A correspondent of *L'Indépendance Belge* gives the following description of the opening performance.

M. Colonne lifts his baton; an impressive silence prevails; twenty thousand heads all bend slightly forward, seeming by this uniform movement to obey some invisible orchestra leader.

Behind the curtain trumpet calls are heard; first successively, then simultaneously, they sound in the distance, and then draw nearer and nearer, until at last they are drowned in a triumphal march which the orchestra strikes up. Then the curtain draws aside, to the right and the left, as at Bayreuth instead of rising perpendicularly.

Cries of admiration go up on every hand; really, it is not a scene, painted and manufactured, but rather a fragment cut out of nature and transferred to the stage. In the distance mountains gilded by the sun; to the right and left two broad roads descending to the foreground; in the centre the altar of the country, half veiled by an immense French flag, while on four tripods arranged around the altar incense burns. The round frame enclosing the scene seems really like the enormous mouth of a telescope through which one sees some fairy-like, mysterious promised land.

While the orchestra is finishing the triumphal march, whose rhythm is broad and brilliant, the stage remains empty; but soon joyful tones resound,—the voices of the wine growers preceded by an allegorical figure, Wine, and the harvesters following the harvest represented by sheaves of wheat.

I note that the author, who belongs to the modern school, gives her music a pronounced local colour, and closely follows the text of her poem. Moreover, choruses act in groups, mingling their songs, answering each other, and thus presenting the illusion of all the real and natural impulses of the people. The songs concluded, winegrowers and harvesters ascend the roads on either side and group themselves at the culminating point of the scene.

Then come the soldiers and sailors to sing the glories of the country; their costumes, borrowed from the war department, produce the greatest effect. Here especial mention must be made of the sailors' chorus.

Sur les flots gris de l'Océan sans bornes
Sous les vents ruisselants.

The music delightfully portrays all the coquettish movements of the sea; and one seems to fill his lungs with the ocean air. This is surely one of the finest pages of the score.

Then the labourers advance, while the soldiers and sailors go to join the winegrowers. After these the Arts, preceded by Genius, who descend slowly and take the place of the labourers; the mixture of allegorical and modern costumes is not one of the least piquant details of this feast of the eyes and ears.

Here comes in one of the most original episodes in the work of Augusta Holmes. As soon as the Arts and Sciences are grouped around the altar, Cupid, the ruddy and frolicsome infant, rushes upon the scene: the orchestra marks his entrance by a motive that delightfully imitates the beating of Cupid's wings against the ether.

Cupid advances, at first hesitating, and then more boldly; he makes a sign, and immediately a multitude of young men rush out and form his train; on the opposite side an adorable apparition, personifying Youth, becomes visible, followed by a group of young girls; the two groups exchange amorous greetings, while in the middle Youth and Cupid make a pretence of embracing each other, expressing by gesture all the impulses of the heart, all the refinements of shared caresses; and finally Cupid kisses Youth upon the brow, and they remain in mutual embrace, while the young people exchange flowers and sing the joy of love in a glorious hymn. The whole scene is one of indescribable sweetness; further, this mixture of pantomime and song constitutes an innovation, all the merit of which belongs to Mme. Holmes; characters expressing simultaneously by gestures the sentiment to which the choruses give voice in their songs,—this is a truly original discovery, worthy of a place in the musical history of our epoch. Who knows but that there resides in this simple detail of a powerful and voluminous work the source of profound modifications of the methods of theatrical art?

The author follows this episode by the introduction of a little chorus of children, who enter with noisy gaiety. After their song the scene darkens, and the choruses, grouped around the altar of the country, murmur sorrowfully. Suddenly a woman, draped in mourning veils, rises from below. She seems to suffer, and stretches forth suppliant arms to the French flag. Cupid and Youth step aside to let her pass, while the choruses, accompanying with their saddened songs the funeral march mournfully played by the strings, cry:—

Apparais, désesse, apparais.

Suddenly the French flag unfolds, and the Republic, radiant and superb, arises on the pedestal of the altar of the country. At that moment full light is turned on. The sun rises above the mountain tops, and the people fall upon their knees; the veiled woman lets her

veil of mourning fall, and appears as France smiling and comforted. And then in glorious unison the Republic, France, and the people raise this great shout of the soul:—

Gloire à toi, Liberté, soleil de l'univers!

So ends this triumphal ode, a work of great power, unequal, but always human, sincere, overflowing with life and reality, and enriched with a stage setting, a luxury of detail and a breadth of conception which class it with the finest manifestations of art in an epoch rich in marvels and wonders.

To the personality and achievements of the author of this work, who is clearly destined to take rank among the great composers, with whom no woman has heretofore been numbered, the *Trans-Atlantic* will return in a future issue.

BLENHEIM CATHOLIC SCHOOLS.

THE boys school was examined last week by Mr. O'Sullivan (St. Patrick's College, Wellington), and Mr. Kirby (of Blenheim). Both gentlemen speak in the highest terms of the discipline and efficiency of the school and of the assiduity of the head master, Mr. M. Calie, and his assistant.

MR. O'SULLIVAN'S REPORT.

Enclosed you will find the result of the written examinations in mathematics in the 6th, 5th, and 4th Standards. The results, as you will see, are most satisfactory with the exception of algebra, which is taught only in the 6th Standard. I think that great proficiency in this particular subject could hardly be looked for, if we bear in mind that it is an extra subject, which is not included in the curriculum of the public schools, and to which much time cannot be devoted without detriment to the more important branches. Eight boys out of 14 presented in algebra passed. In arithmetic five problems were given to each of the three highest standards, and all scored considerably more than the number of marks requisite to secure a pass; the 6th and 4th Standards especially distinguishing themselves; in the former 12 out of 14 presented secured the maximum of marks, whilst in the latter, out of eight presented, five obtained full marks. In the 5th Standard all passed that were presented, although only one boy secured the maximum of marks. All the other examinations were conducted orally. The reading and spelling in all the standards were quite satisfactory, with a single exception history was also answered fairly well by the 3rd and 4th Standards; the majority of the 16 boys presented in the 3rd Standard passed in the geography examination. I also examined the writing and drawing of all the classes, and all, except two in the 4th and 5th Standards, were quite up to the average. I gave some short sentences to be parsed by the 3rd and 4th Standards, and nine boys out of sixteen in the 3rd Standard secured the total number of marks; the remainder obtaining more than the number required for a pass; and all in the 4th answered satisfactorily. I gave several sums to be worked on their slates by the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd Standards, and all showed great proficiency. Special mention must be made of the 3rd Standard, in which nine out of 16 secured full marks. To sum up, I must say that the results show painstaking on the part of the teachers, and steady application by the pupils; and I wish to lay special stress on the great proficiency shown in arithmetic in all the Standards.

MR. KIRBY'S REPORT.

I have the pleasure to report that at your request I have examined the 5th and 6th Standards in the following subjects:—history, geography, and English. The examination was a written one, and there were presented for examination—in the 5th Standard, eight boys; in the 6th Standard, 14 boys; in all 22. In the 6th Standard I find a general proficiency in all the subjects, but owing probably to lack of practice in written examinations, two or three papers were barely passable on account of indifferent writing. In the 5th Standard the papers were uniformly neat. I would suggest the propriety of practising the boys in paper examinations. The answers were all generally correct and very few questions were passed over. Either from undue haste, however, or from an over-desire to condense, brevity in answering was carried too far, and some replies were bald and incomplete. In the history papers I note general accuracy as to dates and names. The English paper was designed to test general knowledge and power of expression, and the result as to the 6th class was satisfactory. In the 5th class the results were not quite so encouraging. The spelling in all cases was quite satisfactory. In analysis none of the pupils showed proficiency, but in parsing all of them answered correctly. In the geography paper nearly all the boys answered intelligently, but the last question given to the 6th class (viz, "trace the course (a) of a sailing vessel (b) of a steamer from London to Singapore, Melbourne, San Francisco, and Liverpool") was not answered with success by more than one or two. Exercises of this particular sort would be found very useful as well as interesting. Speaking generally I have the pleasure to remark that the work shows evidence of careful and conscientious training, and of considerable ability among the scholars.

The McCormick reaping machine is acknowledged to be the best in the world. It is free from all those flaws that render the farmers when using other machines, liable to the occurrence, and the consequent loss, of a frequent break-down. Nothing of the kind need be apprehended by those who are fortunate enough to possess the McCormick machine, but they may reckon on an uninterrupted harvest. It is calculated that in every way the machine reduces, by one half, the work, as well as the expense of the agriculturist making use of it. It is, therefore, most valuable from an economical point of view. Farmers will find themselves more than repaid even in one harvest for the purchase of this machine, and no member of the class desirous of doing his work expeditiously, cheaply, and thoroughly will neglect to avail himself of its aid. Messrs. Morrow, Bassett, and Co., Christchurch and Dunedin, are the sole agents for New Zealand.