

AN ORCHESTRA IN THE HOME.



THERE can be no doubt that "music in the home" is one of the most enjoyable forms which the practice of the art assumes. Nothing could be more intellectually healthy than the gathering together of talented—and, for the matter of that, very ordinary—musical members of a family into a

sort of home orchestral society, while the benefit to art would be considerable. Here in England we have thousands of most musical minds and fingers, to say nothing of voices, while the worlds of music waiting to be conquered put a certain enthusiast and his aspirations completely into the shade. Nevertheless, we are practically barren in turning these materials to account. I do not say we are lacking in musical gatherings, amateur orchestral societies, and the like. On the contrary, there is a plethora of these; but it will not be denied that such take music out of the home rather than put it into it, and have the effect, perhaps, of stemming the tide of mutual musical practice at home rather than of encouraging it. We want more music inside our own doors. Talented fellows have the knack of preferring to air their cleverness in small public performances rather than in the sober surroundings of home, a state of things which is happily to a great extent remediable. When there is more music in the home, there will certainly be more musical gatherings at home.

Let us consider the present average of home musical strength. There is always the pianoforte—not everywhere in the best of tune or condition, so thoughtless do people grow of the harm to themselves and to music in general from the ill-effects arising out of the perpetuating of harmonies from an untrue instrument. With the pianoforte is often associated the harmonium or American organ; and when one has gone thus far the musical resources of most homes (many of them capable of accomplishing more) become, so far as instruments are concerned, exhausted.

In forming an amateur orchestra, the first point that will arise will be, who are to constitute its members. You may have the smallest possible convenience for practising together—thoughts may even revert to so dismal a *locale* as the summer-house in winter. There may be most opposite opinions on the character and schools of music to be practised. Differences there most surely will be "twixt tweedle dum and tweedle dee," but all these points may safely be left to take care of themselves, with the certain assurance that they will come right in the end. For members, first look round your own immediate family circle. Is a string quartet possible? If so, this can be

made the nucleus of a small orchestra. Two of the girls, perhaps, are studying the violin. That Bohemian cousin who paints so well—he dabbles with the 'cello: it is suggested that he will be sure to join if asked. The viola only is wanted, when it is suddenly remembered that it is the pet instrument of one of the girls at "Roseleigh," on the other side of the Common. In a post or two this identical quartet make a musical compact, and everything seems so hopeful, and all are so ardent, that the musical safety and enterprise of even the Monday Populars seem to be placed in jeopardy. But one warns the enthusiasts against soaring too high. An amateur quartet is not going to outrival the doings of any established body of professional players. Much amateur musical work is, I am ready to challenge, equal and even superior to professional work, but this is exceptional only; and the average of professional skill is, as it should be, superior to usual amateur ability. On this account, therefore, I take the passing precaution of discouraging my readers against any attempt at rivalling their professional brethren, though I say nothing against emulating them. The string quartet amplified with the pianoforte and American organ, or harmonium—for, as regards the latter instruments, there are now few homes where these are not associated with the pianoforte—a wider range of music is already possible. Stringed instruments backed up with the pianoforte and harmonium combine well, and an ingenious leading spirit could open up to such a small band an almost inexhaustible wealth of musical works for study.

Thus far our orchestra is established, and the question of adding to it may be considered later on. All the formulæ needing to be gone through are the registration of membership and the settlement of a general weekly or fortnightly meeting for the purpose of a united rehearsal. This may take place alternately at the members' own houses, although it may be found that some one member would not be unwilling for the meetings to be held regularly at his or her residence. This general rehearsal should be a sort of public performance of work done, for it is assumed that membership of such an orchestra would imply the necessity on the part of all engaged to previously qualify themselves, as far as possible, in their respective parts. A strict regard to this point, and that of regular attendance at the general rehearsal, would be indispensable for the bringing about of any good result. When all are so earnest, as a body of such amateurs would naturally be, the consideration of "rules" would seem to be superfluous. Nevertheless, in every well-contained body, and among the most earnest sets of workers, a few "rules" (call them "notes," if you will), setting out the *raison d'être* of the society, the members' names, the dates and hours for general meetings, &c., are useful to ward off the excuses of forgetful minds who can keep no engagement without such memoranda.

Here, then, let us leave for the present this part of our orchestra. It can amuse itself very profitably for weeks in going through four-part music—anthems, glees, part-songs—any music, in fact, within the range of their respective instruments, and which will bear being associated with the piano or organ. This sort of practice may be done at sight, and will afford good opportunity for the members to feel their respective merits in taste as well as in *technique*. Some one more clever than the rest may possibly suggest the arranging of a few well-known songs or ballads, in which the well-worn melody may be given sometimes to the unison of the harmonium, with the accompaniments distributed among the other parts; or the violoncello may not refuse to become responsible for the melody as a foundation capable of sustaining any judicious accompaniments with which the other instruments may clothe it. Vocal or instrumental duets and trios may also be easily adapted to the conditions of such a small orchestra, and, having the merit of simplicity, are better than more ambitious compositions for early practice. It is possible the string quartet may long to attack some compositions belonging to its special sphere. Then a great realm of art opens itself, for the greatest composers told some of their greatest thoughts in this form of composition. Haydn stands foremost, with his exquisite musical breathings. Mozart—equally perfect in quartet music—is followed by the thoughtful Beethoven, Spohr, and Mendelssohn. Schubert and Schumann come next to the great models, and a host of minor composers have contributed to this class of what is termed cabinet music. But for choicest music of this kind, that most nicely balanced, that most likely to rivet the attention for hours together, go to “Father” Haydn, king of writers for stringed instruments.

The earliest orchestras—the *ὀρχήστρα* of the Greeks, for instance—sprang out of a natural tendency on the part of those who could and would sing, to select an accompanying instrument as closely allied as possible to the compass, and fitted to the quality of the voice it was to accompany. Thus were our modern orchestras arrived at. But I am not going to lay down such conditional terms. Our home orchestra is not to be fettered in any such way; its materials are to bear no relation whatever to the vocal qualities of those who are to perform upon the respective instruments; nor need these materials be of any particular *caste*. Talent, happily, is blind here, and music especially has the merit of distributing her favours in a most impartial manner among both rich and poor. Nor need sex be a matter of moment in much that will be possible to our orchestra. Hitherto it has lacked some distinctive features. A clarinet player of good calibre, however, here presents himself, and is accepted. A musical relative jots down a trio for clarinet, violin, and pianoforte, and the performance of this gives a wonderful impetus to the doings. The clarinet brings more colour into the picture; and, if this effect could be heightened by a flute or oboe, we should be verging on the *ultima*

thule of our musical plan. The world of composition opens out, for now quintets, sestets, and octets are possible. You may put in a little brass, for there is sure to be some fellow imitating Levy or Reynolds who will not object to give up an hour or two occasionally towards sustaining the cornet part—as he alone can! If all that is doing prompts some friendly fellow to try his hand with an instrument, then advise him to take to the horn—a useful instrument, and one that will go well with the string quartet in works for five, six, or eight instruments. If other “brass” presents itself, then accept it if it be of tolerable quality. You may even take a drum, for its “rataplan” comes in gloriously, provided that, after a few hundred bars rest, it may be counted upon not to rush in half a bar too soon with a deafening roar, instead of the gentle roll of a moment’s duration. The triangle affords scope for even a child’s management, given the favourable conditions which we hope for in so intelligent a body of musical minds.

Of the music to be played something has already been said. But I would warn our orchestra, even in its fullest moments, against going for Beethoven’s C minor, the “Italian” by Mendelssohn, “Die Weihe der Töne” by Spohr, Schubert’s “Seventh,” or any other symphony. Get among you a ruling spirit (the neighbouring organist should be a capable man); let him be chief. Discuss your own views on the music to be played, and keep in smooth water in preference to getting among breakers; that is to say, don’t attempt the impossible; be content with doing small works rather than big ones; and, if you err at all, err on the side of simplicity rather than the reverse. And bear in mind that arrangements or pieces especially written to suit your particular circumstances and requirements will be better than attempting well-worn scores in which you are forced to leave out the parts you may be without.

Now another aspect presents itself. So intelligent a set of musical minds are not going to fiddle away privately and collectively for any length of time without coming to some reasonable degree of efficiency. The fact is, this amateur orchestra has already been talked about. That earliest of early-informed people—the clergyman—knows of it, and has extracted a promise of its assistance at a concert in the parish school-room in aid of a fund for restoring the church. This is no sooner over than the superintendent of the local Working Men’s Club is busy devising a series of winter entertainments for its members and their wives, and our orchestral society is petitioned to become the backbone of these. The Mothers’ Meeting is to have its annual high tea. Well, music will be wanted. Off goes another request, this time from the curate, and the services of the orchestra are again secured. So one and another of the leading spirits of the place keep matters going, until the engagements of these music-lovers become positively numerous. More than enough local calls are constantly being made upon the good-nature of the party, and two nights in one week have already been promised in this direction, when there comes an appeal from a poor and over-worked

East End vicar, who is related to one of the violinists in the band. The latter tells a pitiful tale of all the misery and poverty which came under her notice when visiting her cousin's parish at the East End, and the prospect of lighting up for a few hours the lives of some of these poor people becomes so manifest that a refusal to the request is deemed impossible. And other such calls for help flow in from all directions where the enlightenment and amusement of the poor is being carried on as an important element in parish work. Nowhere is this being persevered in with more vigour than in some of the poorer East London districts—notably St. Jude's, Whitechapel—and but for the generous response which is made by talented amateurs, who constitute such sets as our orchestral society, it would be difficult to continue this elevating mission work. It is as impossible to over-estimate the good effects of this sort of help as it is to sufficiently imagine the gratitude evidenced on the faces of the audiences one meets in getting about in these "slums." I well remember a visit of Countess Cowper with her *troupe* of "banjoists" to a very poor

part of Shoreditch some time ago. This body of noble performers will have very lively recollections of the maze of squalid courts down which they dived before reaching the scene of their evening's engagement; but even their vivid impressions are more than equalled by the enthusiasm which still reigns among their hearers concerning that memorable musical entertainment.

Endless work of this kind will be for ever presenting itself to our little society, and it will do well to assist where it can. Much good may be done in this way, and the help rendered is of a kind that money cannot buy. Many dark places—some very dark ones—still need lighting up, and thousands of men and women want brightening up too, for it cannot be denied that, despite the gigantic machinery of modern Christianity and of philanthropy, the social condition and the lives of vast numbers of the masses can be likened to little else than a spell of chaos and despair, with which even the Legislature cannot be expected to grapple successfully without having such aid.

FREDERICK J. CROWEST.

THE STORY OF THE HEAVENS.*



IT has been said that, as science advances, poetry declines; that the scientific spirit is inimical to the poetic. Now there is one science, at any rate, of which this cannot be said with the least approach to truth, and that science is astronomy. Dealing almost with the infinite in space and time, the history and facts of astronomy form one great poem whose sublimity is unrivalled, and, as we turn page

that it will be at least 1,000,000 years before that star can reach the bounds of the vast expanse.

Around us myriads of stars shed their glimmering lights across the dark abyss. Here and there patches of nebulous light arrest our attention, and we see that some of these are clusters of stars so remote that their commingling lights form a hazy brightness, while others are evidently masses of incandescent gas of incredible dimensions. Except these bodies there is no visible thing. Sun, Moon, and planets, as we know them, have all alike vanished, and we are in the midst of eternal silence and night, with the stars and the nebulae looking down upon us from afar.

What are those stars? Let us fix our attention on the one we have mentioned. In nothing does it differ in appearance from the myriad others around us, but on closer inspection we observe it is not alone; there are eight little specks which it carries in its train. As we gradually approach it the little star swells out in splendour until it blazes into a Sun, and the eight little specks become mighty planets circling around him; and we recognise the solar system in which our Earth has its place. Let us consider this system somewhat in detail. Of the central Sun we shall say nothing further, as it has already been described in former numbers of this Magazine, but shall turn our attention to the other wonderful bodies which we find within the system. As already noticed, there are eight large planets. These are all dark globes, or spheres of matter, having little or no light of their own, but shining in our heavens with light borrowed from the Sun. They all travel in nearly one plane round the central Sun, in orbits which are nearly, though not quite, circular.

These planets naturally divide themselves into two groups of four each: those comparatively near the

after page of the wondrous story, the grandeur and interest ever increase until the wearied mind sinks exhausted in endeavouring to comprehend the stupendous whole.

Let us, by the scientific use of our imaginations, project ourselves some billions of miles into the regions of space, and from that point survey the universe around us. We shall find ourselves in a huge vault stretching untold millions of miles in every direction, and containing nothing visible save one solitary star rushing through the darkness at the prodigious velocity of six miles in a second.

Such, however, is the extent of space to be traversed

* "The Story of the Heavens," by Robert Stawell Ball, LL.D., F.R.S., F.R.A.S., Royal Astronomer of Ireland (Cassell & Company, Limited).