

THE ROYAL ACADEMY OF MUSIC.



ILL within a very recent period the Royal Academy of Music was the only institution existing in the country where a course of first-rate instruction could be obtained by those who desired to become musical proficient. To-day, in the midst of much friendly competition, it still holds the premier place amongst our schools of music, and pupils flock to it from all parts of the kingdom, and even from distant colonies and foreign countries, eager to avail themselves of its course of study.

The Royal Academy of Music was founded in 1822, and opened its doors in 1823 to ten boys and ten girls who had shown a talent for music. Dr. Crotch was the first Principal, and so useful did the institution prove under his fostering care, that in 1830 it attained the dignity of incorporation, and was granted a royal charter. The earlier years of the Academy were marked by a severe struggle against financial difficulties; several times the funds fell so low that extinction seemed inevitable, and only by some new effort being made to secure subscriptions was the end averted. The year 1868 witnessed the nearest approach to a dissolution that the history of the Royal Academy records. At that time the fortunes of the institution had sunk so low that the managers offered to return the charter to the Queen, who, by reason of its provisions, was unable to accept it, and they gave a six months' notice to the professors and officials. Then occurred what is perhaps the most heroic event in the history of any educational establishment: the professors met and resolved that, in order to keep the Academy open, they would sacrifice, so far as need be, their own fees. This noble resolve on the part of the teaching staff had the desired effect. For the first time the public began to make strong demonstrations of confidence in the institution, and thenceforward the number of pupils constantly increased. The roll of twenty with which the Academy started, has now reached an average of five hundred, and there is scarcely a musician of eminence in the kingdom who has not passed through its course of training. The Government provides the institution with a grant of £500 a year—a sum which is certainly not munificent for the wealthiest nation in the world to give on behalf of musical instruction. The Queen gives an annual donation of a hundred guineas, and the rest of the Royal Family are also liberal in their contributions.

The educational system of the Academy is of the most complete kind, and is the outcome of many years' experience. The management rightly maintain that whatever branch of the profession a student

may wish to devote himself more particularly to, he should have a good general musical education. Thus, the singer, they consider, should play the pianoforte and know something of harmony; the player will specially benefit by a study of harmony and will be all the better for learning to sing. On this principle the studies are arranged, some being compulsory, and the pupil always receiving most attention and instruction in that which he has selected as his principal study. For their leading studies pupils are placed under one of the best professors in the Academy; in their second studies they are allotted to one of the younger or less celebrated teachers.

The Academy is full of small rooms, each of which contains a pianoforte, and in these the lessons are given. All subjects which admit of instruction being imparted to several pupils at a time are taught in classes, but the system adopted is not the ordinary school one. In the harmony, composition, and other theoretical branches, each student receives his half-hour of individual teaching just as in the other subjects, but all pupils are asked to remain and listen to the remarks of the teacher on their fellow-students' work. A great deal of extra knowledge is thus acquired by the pupil, the teacher being led to say many things which he would not have thought of mentioning to a solitary student. Some of the singing and pianoforte professors also allow students to overhear their lessons, and this proves of the greatest benefit to those who themselves desire to become teachers. Many former students of the Academy have had their talents so fostered in this way that they are now allowed to fill the post of professor. Indeed a large proportion of the present staff of teachers were themselves Academy pupils. This is useful as showing the good work done by the institution; whilst it helps also to engender a feeling of unity between teachers and pupils.

Instrumental and vocal students alike derive much benefit from the weekly rehearsals with the orchestra. The programmes on these occasions are always exceedingly varied, being compiled so as to afford singers and players of solo instruments opportunities for practice with the band. Frequently at these practisings original compositions by the students are tried over, and the writers have thus the best means afforded them of judging their work. Ample proof of the pupils' progress is shown by the concerts, nine of which are given yearly by the students in St. James's Hall. The choir and vocal and instrumental pupils take part in these concerts, and a pleasing *tout ensemble* is gained by the lady students wearing the Academy costume, which consists of a white muslin dress close to the throat and wrists, white kid gloves, and a red silk ribbon sash fastened on the right shoulder, and crossing to the left side under the waist. Male students wear evening dress, and pupils who have gained medals are required to wear these at all public concerts.

The Royal Academy stands almost alone in having a complete orchestra composed exclusively of the students and their teachers. The advantages of such an orchestra are so apparent that they do not need to be enlarged on. Mr. Joseph Barnby has recently been appointed to the post of conductor in the



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institution, and, under the care of so able and experienced a musician, the choral and orchestral practices and concerts are likely to become more valuable and interesting than ever.

The cost of instruction at the Royal Academy is frequently compared unfavourably with that of foreign conservatories, Leipzig being specially signalled out for its cheapness. Now, it is true that the fees for the session at Leipzig are much less than those of the Royal Academy—the former being fifteen guineas and the latter thirty-three—but when the travelling and other expenses of a pupil going abroad for study are taken into account it will be found that the pecu-

niary advantages are not so great as at first sight they appear, and beyond the simultaneous acquirement of a language there is certainly no mental gain by leaving home. The Royal Academy possesses besides several valuable scholarships and prizes open to all, while the few which Leipzig has in its gift are open to natives of Saxony only. Several scholarships providing from one to three years' free tuition are annually offered by the Academy to male and female students for the highest proficiency displayed in almost every branch of musical study. A recent and most valuable bequest is the Sir Michael Costa scholarship of £120 a year, tenable for five years; and there have lately been endowed a scholarship in memory of Mme. Sainton Dolby, and another in honour of the late Dr. Franz Liszt, both of which will soon be open for competition. Besides these scholarships there are many prizes—in the shape of money, musical instruments, books, and medals—by which diligent pupils are greatly assisted and encouraged. Several names now well known in the musical world have held the best of the Academy scholarships and been awarded its prizes. Sir Arthur Sullivan was Mendelssohn scholar in 1856; Mme. Valleria was the Westmoreland scholar in 1867, while Miss Mary Davies, Miss Bolingbroke, and several other equally popular artists seem to have resigned one good prize merely to win a better.

No sketch of the Royal Academy of Music could be complete without reference to Sir George Macfarren, the Principal of the institution. His devotion to the work of the Academy is perfect, and no one within the walls labours harder for the students or shows more interest in their progress. In a recent address Sir George spoke of himself as fortunate in obtaining the regard of the teachers and students in an institution in which he had been their forerunner, and in which he was still working to the same end as they. This is exactly the spirit which animates him, and its effect on a large number of pupils may be imagined. His annual addresses to the students are eagerly looked forward to, and are greatly valued for the sound advice and kindly exhortation they contain for those about to enter on a musical career. The Principal's sympathies are entirely in favour of English art, and against the fashion of unduly exalting everything foreign, and this alone is a worthy qualification for one holding so high a position in an institution which may truly be called national.

A glance at the list of members and honorary members shows that the Academy has the support and confidence of the majority of the English musical profession. With a reputation so well established, its progress is secure; and it may look to the future with every confidence, assured that substantial tokens of the national regard will be as freely bestowed as they have been in the past.