

## THE QUEEN OF PIANISTS.



F the numerous male players of the pianoforte now before the public, it would perhaps be rash to say who is most deserving of the title of King of Pianists. While Liszt was yet in the zenith of his fame the premier rank was a matter of certainty. Now, however, the difference between quantity and quality of notes among even first-class players is so great, that those who wish to form an opinion are placed in a difficult position; and it is to be feared that the preference is too readily given to the executant who strikes the greatest number of digitals in any given time rather than to the player who aims, not at rapidity, but at beauty of tone. Those who have listened to Charles Hallé have listened to a pianist whose *technique* is subservient to his tone, and whose sweet, supple, and singing style of execution is in reality the very highest development of pianoforte playing.

But if we are in doubt as to who should be awarded the first place among the male players of the pianoforte, we can have no hesitation as to the lady who fills that position. It is now close upon sixty years since Madame Schumann commenced her public career as a pianist. Since her first appearance, in 1832, until now, many players of varying degrees of merit have come before the musical world, yet not one of these has retained the powerful hold upon the public mind that has been gained by Madame Schumann. Coming on the scene only a few years later than Liszt, she still occupies the foremost place among the players of the day; while Liszt, long years before his death, in 1886, had ceased to be an object of delight and astonishment in the musical world.

Every student of Schumann's remarkable life-story knows of his romantic courtship of Clara Wieck, the protracted engagement of the lovers, and finally, in 1840, their marriage. Schumann, like not a few of the other great composers, had been intended by his parents for the law, and it was only through the advice of Wieck, the celebrated teacher of the pianoforte, that the family gave up their opposition. The young man had resolved to become a *virtuoso* of the pianoforte, and the pursuit of this resolve led him a good deal into association with Wieck and his family. Of the teacher's two daughters, Schumann was probably at first attracted to Clara on account of her exceptional abilities as a player. In the autobiography of Moscheles, we find frequent references to meetings with Schumann at the house of the Wiecks, and the playing of Clara is spoken of as "superb, and void of all affectation." Eight years before her marriage, Clara Wieck had made her first appearance in public in the critical town of Leipzig, and the enthusiasm with which she was received must have had no small effect in engendering that affection in the heart

of the ambitious young man which culminated in his union with the lady in 1840. By this time Schumann had fully entered on his career as a composer. He had been obliged to give up the idea of becoming a finished player, owing to a weakening of his third finger by means of some mechanical contrivance



ELLIOTT &amp; FRY

PHOTO

MADAME SCHUMANN.

which he had devised for a directly opposite purpose. He may himself have regretted the sacrifice, but we who know the history, know that music gained in a higher walk what it lost in a lower. The player leaves behind him, after all, little more than a memory amongst those who may have heard his performances; the composer of genius is remembered not through the age in which he writes only, but through all time.

The married life of Madame Schumann proved a comparatively short one. That strange mental trouble which seized her husband so weakened his constitution, that the end came when he was only forty-six. The two had lived together not quite fourteen years, for Schumann's mind had become so affected by 1854 that he had to be removed to a private asylum. In

the meantime, Madame Schumann had made her first visit to England, when she appeared at the Philharmonic Society's opening concert of 1856, playing Beethoven's Concerto in E flat, and Mendelssohn's "Variations Sérieuses." She also appeared at the second concert, and at the Musical Union, but had to hurry back to Bonn to receive her husband's dying embraces.

With a feeling of sadness we think of the last days of Schumann. What compositions might he not have given us if he had lived—as in the course of nature he might have done—until now, with intellect unclouded, and with all the accumulated experience of ripening years! In novelty and in decided beauty and ingenuity of effect the pianoforte pieces he has left to us are unrivalled, and when played as they are played by the talented lady who bears his name, the instrument appears in its noblest form.

It must not be supposed that Madame Schumann has espoused with too much ardour the cause of her husband. Indeed, one of the greatest secrets of her success is the attention she has given to the works of men of various styles and degrees of excellence. Madame Schumann was one of the earliest players who took up the music of Chopin; she helped considerably to bring the works of Mendelssohn before the public; and only a few years ago we find her performing for the first time in England one of Brahms' recent and most advanced compositions. For many years after his death, she seldom played her husband's music, and it must be acknowledged that Rubinstein and Hans von Bülow have done quite as much to popularise Schumann's works in England

as has been done by his widow. But while her intellect has saved her from becoming a mere partisan, as would have been natural and even excusable, her special sympathy combined with her technical ability has made her at once the most faithful, the most earnest, and the most intelligent interpreter of Schumann's pianoforte compositions we have ever heard. In the words of one of her critics, Madame Schumann is "the acknowledged chief of the classical school, her style being marked by high intellectuality, an utter absence of mere vulgar display, and an unvarying respect for the composer's intentions." So much as this it would hardly be possible to say with truth of more than a very few of the great pianists now before the public.

Madame Schumann's second visit to England was made in 1865. She came again in 1867, and annually from that year until 1877, appearing occasionally since. Her health of late years has not been such as to permit of much travelling; but it has been sufficiently good to allow of her performing the duties of a high-class instructor at Dr. Hoch's Conservatoire at Frankfurt. One of her pupils, Miss Fanny Davies, is now well known to the musical public, and others will doubtless yet come forward bearing further evidences of her careful training. After well-nigh sixty years of close professional labour, the veteran pianist might well claim to spend her remaining days in retirement; but let us hope that she may yet visit us for several years to come, and delight us with those interpretations of the works of the great masters which have ever made her so welcome a performer on the platforms of our Metropolitan concert-rooms.

J. CUTHBERT HADDEN.

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## THE LUCKY BAR OF DUNWOOD MERE.

(THE CHRONICLES OF CARDEWE MANOR.)

BY LUCY FARMER.

### CHAPTER THE FIRST.

#### THE "HAUNTED WOOD."



IND the horses!—you'll be run over!" I screamed out as little Charley ran across the road, right in front of a carriage and pair. He gave me a turn, I do assure you.

It was in the road before our own little house. My husband was away in the preserves, and that child was as wild as a hawk, pointing his toy-gun at sparrows, and shooting our hens dead over and over again. He stood in the road and was bagging some sparrows when the carriage turned the corner, and my heart was in my mouth in a second.

The coachman pulled up and let out a few words at Charley, who only pointed his gun at him; but while I was standing on the path, waiting for the boy, who

didn't want to be shaken or boxed, some one in the carriage exclaimed—

"Why, it is Mrs. Farmer! How do you do, Mrs. Farmer?"

I looked at the lady, who was nodding very pleasant and smiling; but though I remembered her face I couldn't put a name to it. "Dear me!" I thought, "I wonder who you are. How stupid!"

"I am very well, thank you, ma'am," I said, "and I hope you're the same."

"I see, you do not recollect me, Lucy Farmer; but you will when I tell you I am Mrs. Williamson, of Puddleham. Now do you remember?"

"Miss Mathers that was! Of course I do. Oh, ma'am, wasn't it a mercy you were saved off that horse—out of the horrible pit, as the vicar said? Indeed, and I'm glad to see you so well, Mrs. Williamson. Is the captain quite well, ma'am?"