

OUR SOIRÉE MUSICALE.



“WHY not have a Soirée Musicale?” said Adolphus Tweedlegig argumentatively. “Why not?” echoed the present writer reflectively.

The result of the foregoing conversation was, that it was resolved to hold a Soirée Musicale forthwith, in the great hall of the Public Lyceum at Mud-

worthy, in support of the funds of the Mount Parnassus Literary Society, of which my friend Adolphus Tweedlegig was honorary secretary, and of which I had quite recently become a humble but aspiring member.

This society was formed for the purpose of bringing into noble companionship the soaring intellects of Mudworthy, who, spurning the terrestrial prosaics of things mundane, plumed their wings for flight towards those sublime heights whence the society took its name. It held periodical meetings, at which the members discussed the last new novel, the latest discovery in the scientific world, the attitude of the Government, or the greatness and importance of the Mount Parnassus Literary Society. It also possessed an organ of its own, called the *Parnassian Meteor*, to which the members contributed brilliant and soul-stirring articles, philosophic essays, mediæval romances, or tender effusions of the poetic muse. Some of the theories for the better government of the universe, for instance, which had first seen the light in its pages, would, if carried out, have inaugurated a new era in the history of mankind; but a callous and blind world neglected them, and the universe went on in its old humdrum style.

A man of the name of Baggs had proposed to join the society. A shudder ran through the members when the name was announced, it was so horribly suggestive of trade. But his references were good. A baronet was second-cousin to his maternal grandmother, and a blackrod-in-waiting had once distinguished his father's stock. So he was duly elected, and was to be formally admitted at the next general meeting.

At a meeting prior to that, however, the secretary did not appear at his usual time, and the most alarming surmises as to the cause of his absence were indulged in.

Presently the door was suddenly opened, and he

staggered in, cast an anxious look round the room, and sank into the nearest chair.

All gathered round him, and implored him to speak, but for some time all his efforts to articulate were vain.

In the dead silence that ensued, only one word was spoken, but it was a word of dread import, and it fell from the secretary's lips.

“Soap!” he feebly articulated, and gasped for breath. “Yes,” he went on in an agonised voice—“yes, it is too true. That traitor Baggs deals in soap, and all is lost!” and he buried his face in his hands.

After a short time they were able to collect their scattered energies sufficiently to form a deputation on the spot to wait upon Baggs, and ask him to resign. Adolphus was spokesman, and put it to him with the eloquence of despair. He read the fundamental rule about blood, and besought him in moving tones to behave as a man, and not wound the feelings of a number of ladies and gentlemen whose tenderly nurtured souls would fade and wither if brought in contact with the atmosphere of soap.

“Gentlemen,” said the unhappy trader thus addressed, “I am greatly obliged to you. After what you have told me, I would not become a member of your society for the world. I wish you good morning, and trust you will never again demean yourselves by crossing my threshold—else,” he added, “I fear I may be tempted to kick you individually out.”

The deputation then hastily left in silent scorn.

However, this by the way. A Soirée Musicale was decided upon, a committee of ladies was appointed, and the secretary was entrusted to draw up a manifesto that should adequately represent the society, and at the same time exert a salutary influence on the minds of any members of the outside world into whose hands it might chance to stray. And this task was most admirably performed, for every line bore the unmistakable impress of blood of the deepest and purest azure.

Adolphus Tweedlegig had been unanimously elected M.C., and wore on his bosom, in sign and token thereof, a tasteful composition in gilt and emerald, about the size of a sun-flower.

By half-past seven the guests began to arrive, and the great hall to fill.

“Mr. Democritus Blobb,” shouts the man at the door, as a diminutive youth with straw-coloured hair and green spectacles enters, and elbows his way in our direction.

“Here comes one of the cleverest fellows in London,” whispers the M.C. in my ear; “you remember how he cut up Tyndall and his primordial atomic theory in the *Parnassian Meteor*? You should see him experiment on gunpowder; it would astonish you.”

I am introduced to this distinguished pyrotechnist, and note that he has neither eyebrows nor eyelashes. This, I am subsequently informed, is owing to the fact

that once a week at least an experiment explodes under his nose. Such are the contingencies of an earnest devotion to science.

"Mr. Charles and Miss Amarinth Tubginger," is the next announcement.

The M.C. rushes away to greet them with great fervour, presently returning with the beautiful Amarinth on his arm.

"I shall now have the pleasure of making known to each other two distinguished contributors to the *Parnassian Meteor*," he observes with great *empressement*. "Miss Amarinth Tubginger—Mr. Democritus Blobb."

The two celebrities bow, much in the same way as mere mortals do, while Tweedlegig observes to me in a stage-whisper—

"Miss Tubginger is our great satirist; so you had better be careful what you say before her. Probably you have read her sketches signed 'Juvenal'?"

I am compelled to confess with shame that the pungent lucubrations of the fair Amarinth are unknown to me; but I express a fervent hope that at a very early date I may be able to refresh my soul by their perusal.

"And when you do," continues Tweedlegig, "just notice the mild and sparkling wit—the rich and covert humour that abounds in them. Humour! why, Dickens is nothing to her."

I regard this prodigy with admiration and awe. She is a heavy young lady, with a row of corkscrew-curly, and a costume of pink tarlatan, and looks more like the compiler of a cookery-book than a satirist. But thus does Nature ever hide her choicest treasures. Diamonds in the bowels of the earth; genius behind a tendency to *embonpoint* and pink tarlatan. I may just perhaps add that I subsequently found her writings far surpassed the eulogium passed upon them. The wit might not invariably be sparkling, but it was splendidly mild; the humour was not always rich, but it was superlatively covert.

"Who is that lovely blonde on Fitzcatgut's arm?" I presently inquired of Tweedlegig.

"Oh, that's his famous sister Cordelia, one of the finest poets our Society has produced. All those verses signed 'C,' and a note of admiration, are from her pen. Talk of sentiment! some of her compositions are sentiment itself; and such rhymes!! why, she can actually beat Tennyson at rhymes!!"

"Why does she wear her hair so untidily?" I ventured to observe.

"Untidily!" said my friend warmly; "why, my dear fellow, that's just her finest characteristic. Her verses are just the same. No conventionality—no restraint; the gush of unfettered genius is apparent in every line. She scorns the trammels both of hair-pins and metres."

A voluminous man, accompanied by a violoncello swathed in green baize, now enters the room; and a whisper goes round that he is the great Mr. Bombazine. While I contemplate him from a respectful distance, I am informed that he is a local magnate, and that next to himself he regards his

cello as the most important unit in Mudworthy. From the number of people that hasten to revolve round him, I judge that, like other luminaries, he has his satellites, who aspire to shine with a little reflected radiance. This, I observe, he benignly allows them to do, until one of them presumes to glimmer on his own account; and then—down goes a social extinguisher, and the sun of Bombazine shines alone.

At eight o'clock the entertainment commenced. It comprised songs in three languages, a duet for flute and trombone, one for violin and cello, with piano accompaniment (by desire); a trio for harp, piano, and bagpipes, composed by Mr. Sandy MacWhirtir, and never before performed in public; and a finale, in which all the performers united, and strove in a most brilliant manner for mastery.

Adolphus Tweedlegig led off with a tenor aria, in which he called down vengeance on an imaginary foe in his finest style. All were delighted; Miss Fitzcatgut was enthusiastic.

"Such a *voce-di-petto* he has!" she cried; "he reminds me of the great Brownini. Ah! his *chiaroscuro* was superb, while his *passionatamente* passages were absolutely thrilling!"

Mr. Longwinde Fitzspouter then gave some dramatic recitations, in which he leaped and sprung, panted and raved, ruffled his hair and beat his breasts in a most finished and artistic style, and was of course applauded to the echo.

But the palm of honour must be awarded to the duet between violin and cello, with piano accompaniment. It was entitled the "Siege of Seringapatam;" and if the piano might represent the besieged, the violin would represent the light infantry and the cello the artillery of the besiegers. It commenced with a slow movement, as though the combatants were marshalling their forces for the encounter; then suddenly the violin gave a fiendish scream, and rushed to the assault, and was answered by a clang from the piano and a groan from the cello. Then it retired, and gave place to the cello, which executed a flank movement to a weird and lugubrious monotone, and ended by flinging a fierce note at the piano, which caught it up, twisted it, deployed round it, and worked out variations upon it in a most strategical manner. Then the violin, in attempting to scale the walls, ran up the gamut, and fell back; then got up a little higher, and again missed its footing; and at last, having got to the top, was met by its opponent, which made a frantic rush from its very lowest to its very highest note, and hurled it with a crash to the bottom again, while the cello fired off a heavy cannonade of grunts with deadly effect. Then they all fell into a minor key, and wailed and sobbed with anguish, which of course represented the cries of the wounded and dying. Then they once more resumed hostilities, and after a most animated passage, which, as Miss Fitzcatgut very poetically observed, was "*furiosamente* to its heart's core," the piano capitulated, and joined with its late opponents in "God save the Queen." E. M.