

Review

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*Deux Polonaises pour le Piano à quatre mains.* Composées par Reginald Bowerman. [Exeter: D. Smith.]

THE composer of these two sketches for four hands is a stranger to us, but his graceful music makes us long for his better acquaintance. Little, indeed, is attempted, but that little is well done. The first Polonaise, in E major, has a light, pleasing theme, the hands of both players are employed to a purpose throughout, and some little passages of imitation materially increase the effect of the piece. No. 2, in D minor, is perhaps the better of the two, and in this again we have figures woven in with the subjects, which proves that the composer does not rely upon mere prettiness. Both pieces present no remarkable difficulties, but a free and elastic finger will be required to do them the justice they deserve.

*Voices.* Song. Words by H. J. Trueman. Music by Ernest Birch. [Enoch and Sons.]

THERE is much musical feeling in this little Ballad; but Mr. Birch must be warned from falling into a restless style of accompaniment by attempting to do more than the unpretending character of his vocal part will legitimately bear. We know that it is difficult to be simple, but it is what a student should aim at; and perhaps when the composer of the song before us hears an accompanist labouring to play the melody (which is divided between the two hands) and distressing the singer with the *staccato* chords in the last eight bars of each verse, he may wish that he had been less ambitious.

*Poo Teén Loh, or The World's Delight.* The Chinese National Air. Arranged for the Pianoforte by Sir Julius Benedict. [Stanley Lucas, Weber and Co.]

THIS national air, supplied by his Excellency the Marquis Tsêng, Minister of China to the Court of St. James's, is built upon what is known as the "pentatonic scale," and certainly possesses very decided character. How far the harmonies written by so excellent a musician as Sir Julius Benedict might satisfy Chinese ears it is impossible to say, but it is evident that the arrangement of it has been a labour of love; and as, from the source whence it is derived, we may feel certain of the accuracy of the melody, we welcome the little piece as an interesting contribution from a country which has up to the present time contributed but little towards the "World's Delight" in music.

*Easy Sketches for Violin and Pianoforte.* By Max Schröter. [B. Williams.]

As the violin may now be termed a domestic instrument, music thoroughly within the powers of moderately advanced players will soon be eagerly sought for; and it is good, therefore, to find that accomplished composers are employing themselves in providing for the demand. It is a hopeful sign of the times that flimsy fantasias from Italian operas, and easily arranged airs with bald pianoforte accompaniments, should be gradually giving place to original pieces—however simple they may be—written for both instruments; and we cordially welcome the twelve Sketches before us as a healthy addition to the increasing store of such compositions. They are all melodious, carefully harmonised, and accompanied in a musicianlike manner. The "Barcarolle," "Humoresque," "Polka Gracieuse," "Mazurka," and "Saltarello" may perhaps be cited as amongst the best of the set; but there is not one weak number, and the young violinist may depend upon finding in all these little pieces good practice, as well as good music.

*Inconstancy.* Song. Poetry by J. Lodge Ellerton. Music by Frank D'Alquen. [Duncan Davison and Co.]

AN unusually long but extremely elegant symphony introduces this Ballad, one of the most expressive we have seen from the pen of this composer. The change into the tonic minor, and the transient modulations which follow, seem to grow naturally from the feeling of the melody, which is throughout thoroughly sympathetic with the words. We are glad to call attention to so good a specimen of unpretentious song-writing.

*The Trysting Well.* Song. Poetry by Edward Foskett. Music by Berthold Tours. [Weekes and Co.]

MR. BERTHOLD TOURS is taking high rank amongst the song-writers of the day, for, although he writes much, he never writes carelessly. "The Trysting Well" is a notable instance of the power of an accomplished composer to invest a simple subject with interest. The theme of this song sympathises in its unpretentious character with the words; but its treatment is so varied as to hold the attention of the listener to the end of the little story, which, although an old one, we never tire of hearing, especially when wedded to such excellent music as that of Mr. Tours.

#### FOREIGN NOTES.

IT is a distinctly remarkable feature in the controversy excited by Richard Wagner's music dramas, since the appearance of "Tannhäuser," that their subject-matter, or "poetic basis," to use a Wagnerian expression, has engaged the attention of critical writers at least as much as the music to which they are wedded. Time was—and not so very remote either—when the libretto of an opera was considered of very secondary importance indeed. It was Wagner's immediate predecessor in the self-imposed task of creating a national German opera, C. M. von Weber, who first laid down the maxim that the composer of an opera should be responsible also for the choice of his book. Although certainly unfortunate in the selection of his "Euryanthe," as treated by Helmine von Chezy, he had at all events identified himself with the subject, and the influence of this work, both as to its subject-matter and musical treatment, is distinctly traceable both in "Tannhäuser," and more conspicuously, even as to details, in "Lohengrin." Still, "Euryanthe" as a stage drama provoked very little criticism at the time of its first production at German operatic establishments, and the degree of estimation in which the dramatic vehicle to an opera was held at even a later period, in this country, may be illustrated by the remarks contained in a leading English journal concerning a performance of Weber's *chef-d'œuvre* in London some forty-five years ago. "It ['Euryanthe'] is called a romantic opera," says the critic in question, "and as to the subject and action of the drama it is indeed romantic enough. However, it is neither usual nor practicable to consider too curiously the dramatic merits of such productions; and if they serve to carry on the music, which is the more important matter, the poet attains the object at which alone he most probably aimed, and the audience may be satisfied." How different the standard which then sufficed for an operatic poem to pass muster to that applied to the same work on its recent production by the German company at Drury Lane! Nor can it be for a moment doubted that it is owing in a large measure to Wagner's reformatory efforts that this standard has been raised to its present exacting elevation. Wagner, the poet, has moreover, both by the choice and the treatment of his dramatic subjects, given a powerful impetus to the revival of the study, on the part, at all events, of his countrymen, of the poetic masterpieces of a classical period of their national literature. The book of "Parsifal," like its predecessor "Der Ring des Nibelungen," had been in the hands of the public years before the work met with its stage realisation as a music-drama at Bayreuth, and has already produced numerous essays, pamphlets, and even entire volumes, concerning the origin and significance of the legend, and the epic poem of Wolfram von Eschenbach, upon which "Parsifal" is mainly founded. This fact manifests in itself an eminently creative faculty in Wagner, apart from his musical genius, and marks an enormous step in the development of what was once contemptuously styled the musical "libretto."

We have been led into these observations by the perusal of various articles contained in continental journals (of which we gave a partial *résumé* in our last number) respecting the now historical performances of Wagner's latest music-drama at the little Bavarian town, and in nearly all of which a preponderating share of criticism has been bestowed upon the poet's handling of the subject, while a certain reserve is, not unfittingly, exercised with regard to that of the musician. Hence there is but little of particular interest now to add, in a