

MUSIC IN AUSTRALIA.

THE LESSONS OF RECENT EXAMINATIONS.

CHATS WITH THE EXAMINERS.

[By MUSICIANS.]

The most striking feature in connection with the recent examinations of the University in practice of music was the large number of failures in the junior piano-playing, and also the small percentage of first classes that were obtained in this division. Speaking on this subject Professor Ives said—"In the Junior Division of pianoforte-playing there was evidence of great carelessness on the part of teachers or students, or both. Scales were badly played with uneven tone and with incorrect fingering, the thumbs being placed on black keys, and a host of minor faults. The pieces chosen by junior candidates were in many cases most unsuitable. Difficult sonatas by Beethoven were attempted by some who were unable to play a simple scale passage satisfactorily. Mendelssohn's "Lieder ohne worte" and Heller's well-known "Tarantella" in A flat were selected by a large number of candidates, many of whom were too young to appreciate the poetical significance of the former, or cope with the technical difficulties of the latter. I am sorry to again notice that despite the numerous occasions on which I have mentioned this matter so many teachers will persist in these unwise selections. In place of Mendelssohn's "Lieder," which make considerable demands upon the artistic faculties, and in many cases the technique also, teachers would do wisely to choose some of the easier sonatas of Mozart or Haydn, pieces which every piano student should study, and which are well within the powers of the average junior student.

"Phrasing, too, is a branch of technique to which far too little attention has been paid. Candidates will answer readily enough questions about the meaning of signs used by composers to show their intentions regarding the manner of performance. Theoretically the students were aware that *legato* means a passage to be played smoothly, that *cresc.* means gradually increasing in volume of tone, &c.; but all the same they did not put their theoretical knowledge into actual practice. Even rests were calmly ignored."

"I am quite satisfied," continued the Professor, "that there is a large amount of careless teaching going on, and it is painful for an examiner to have to sit by and notice that candidates have not even got their selected piece note-perfect. I don't refer, of course, to a mere slip of the finger, but to the fact which we too often proved, by asking the students to repeat passages, that these had absolutely been learnt incorrectly. Then, again, rests were omitted; *legato* passages played *staccato*, and *vice versa*; and *piano*, *forte*, *crescendo*, and *diminuendo* portions were interpreted all with the same tone quality. In short, with the majority of the junior candidates there was little evidence of careful teaching.

"With regard to the sight-reading tests, they were very easy ones, but even as such they served to show this department of the students' training in a very unfavourable light. Fully one-half of the junior pianoforte candidates were absolutely unfit to enter for this standard. They should have taken the primary test.

"The senior candidates for piano-playing were, on the other hand, generally satisfactory. Last year the failures in this division were very numerous; this year they were few. Some performances were excellent, and one candidate gained honours, and several others obtained high marks. The scales and arpeggios, attention to phrasing, choice of piece, and intelligent description of the formal structure of the selection played were in many cases, I am glad to say, very creditable to both pupils and teachers.

"The theoretical portion of the examinations in both divisions was the best, and I was very much pleased with the general smartness of the candidates. Not only were answers readily given, but statements were at times made which showed that very creditable work is being done by both teachers and students in this department."

When the examinations in Adelaide were concluded I had a chat with Mr. C. Lee Williams, Mus. Bac., the representative of the Combined Board of the Royal Academy and Royal College of Music, London. This gentleman had not only examined in Adelaide, but, on account of the English Board, in each of the eastern colonies and Tasmania. Of his qualifications for this office it may be said that he was for fifteen years organist of Gloucester Cathedral, and on five occasions conducted the great Triennial Festival of the Three Choirs which is held there. He is a composer of recognised ability, three of his works having been performed at the Gloucester Festival, and he is a good performer on the organ, piano, viola, 'cello, and French horn. Mr. Williams was engaged as an examiner by the Combined Board in January, 1887, and at once threw up his appointment at Gloucester. This was, however, mainly brought about by the fact that he was suffering severely with his throat, and a change of locality and travel became imperative.

Speaking of the South Australian candidates in piano-playing, Mr. Williams said—"In many cases there was a sad want of attention to technical details, and I should imagine that exercises and scales received a minimum amount of attention. Many students who were struggling with Beethoven's sonatas should have been practising Bach's two-part 'Inventions.'" This weakness was particularly apparent in the junior department. The senior students were, generally speaking, much better. I may say also that some two or three pianists and one young lady violiniste struck me as being very promising, and moreover gave evidence of excellent training. So far as their answers to theoretical questions went the students were highly satisfactory, but in technique and general attention to detail many of them were sadly at fault. The choice of pieces, too, was, in many cases, a highly injudicious one, and I am quite satisfied that there must be a number of incompetent teachers in South Australia."

Speaking of his experiences in the eastern colonies and Tasmania, Mr. Williams said—"I commenced my work at Rockhampton, in Queensland, with the thermometer at 105° in the shade. Fancy that for an Englishman! Well, some two or three of the candidates here quite surprised me, particularly by their technical proficiency. In Sydney, and New South Wales generally, the candidates were somewhat disappointing, though in Sydney there was one young lady pianiste who gained a very high percentage—95 or 96 marks. Also, at Toowoomba, a boy of fourteen played the piano in a manner that quite surprised me, and besides evidenced a fine knowledge of theory. The Melbourne candidates were throughout good, and I am convinced that there must be a number of highly trained teachers in all branches of the art in Victoria. The majority of these students were quite up to the standard of the best that you meet in the large English towns. I don't think I examined any student whomight be termed a genius, though there were several who were very promising. The most common fault throughout the colonies was in the selection of a piece. In several cases children of ten and eleven brought Mendelssohn's 'Lieder ohne worte,' pieces that were entirely beyond their comprehension. The greatest disappointment that I experienced was with the vocalists. Hearing so much of Australia as a voice-producing country, and knowing of the fine powers of your Australian vocalists, Melba, Ada Crossley, and Amy Sherwin, I naturally expected to meet with some voices of more than average promise. So far I am sorry to say this hope has not been realized, for I have not met one vocal candidate strikingly gifted. This, however, may be simply the accident of circumstances. I trust it is so, and that Australia will again send us such fine singers as those I have already mentioned."

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A CONSERVATORIUM OF MUSIC.

As *The Register* announced on Saturday a very important step was taken by the Council of the Adelaide University on Friday last. We allude, of course, to the adoption of a resolution to found a Conservatorium of Music, at which all branches of the art shall be taught. Hitherto Professor Ives's lectures at the University have dealt only with the theoretical side of music; but a musical nation is not to be built up by mere enquiries into the derivation of discords, or discussions on the niceties of contrapuntal laws. A knowledge of harmony and counterpoint is essential to the making of a composer, and is of great value in forming the tastes of executive artists. The people, however, generally prefer to judge a musician by his practical powers, and probably more encouragement is given to musical study by the performances of great artists on the concert platform than by theoretical discourses in the lecture-room. If we are to make marked progress musically we must produce executive as well as theoretical musicians. Professor Ives evidently shares this view. While doing good work in his own department, so far as circumstances have enabled him to accomplish it, he has promoted the study of practical subjects, such as pianoforte-playing and singing, among those who are assisting in the duties of musical education. This has been done by means of the excellent system of examinations in music which was instituted some time ago, and for which music teachers have cause to be thankful; for not only have these examinations encouraged our young colonists to study practical matters, but the requirements of the examiners have greatly assisted the conscientious teacher in his efforts to induce pupils to practise good music and to thus cultivate the mind as well as the fingers. Still, it must be conceded that an institution that only encourages and does not directly assist in such work falls short of the ideal.

Hitherto the University has not been able to do this, as its funds have not permitted it to provide teachers of practical subjects. Now, however, the munificent benefactions of the late Sir Thomas Elder have placed it in a position to give increased facilities for the study of music, and the ability to do this becomes obviously an obligation. Professor Ives has visited Europe, where he has consulted the highest authorities in musical circles, and we may take it for granted that the suggestions which he has made are the result of the advice which he has received; and, if his advisers have recommended a Conservatorium as the best means of utilizing the funds placed at their disposal, the University authorities are quite right in giving effect to that recommendation. Members of the musical profession may at first regard the new institution in the light of a rival, but they should remember that the University authorities have practically no choice in the matter, and that the highest advancement of musical education in the colony is a desideratum in the public interest. The whole question must not be considered from the standpoint of what is convenient to the individual teacher, but from that of what is best for the community at large. It will, however, be expedient for the Council of the University to regard the welfare of the many teachers of music in South Australia who have worked well in the cause of musical education. Will it not be possible wisely to employ some of our local instructors in the new institution? Such a course would be a fitting recognition of past services to the art of music, and a means of averting the hardships which would result from the importation of an entirely new staff of teachers. We commend this suggestion to the consideration of the Council; and Professor Ives may be trusted to guard the interests of the musical profession at this stage of their experience. Thus will be facilitated the practical completion of the agencies for the promotion of musical taste in South Australia.