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[From "The Tomahawk."]

THE LONDON MUSIC HALLS.

No institution has ever proved more thoroughly false to its early promise than has the Music Hall.

We were told, when the idea first came into notice, that its encouragement would assuredly exercise a beneficial influence over the progress of music amongst the lower classes; that many people, who now spend the hours of night in dissolute indulgence at the public house, would, in time, be weaned from their evil doings, and that the souls of our less wealthy fellow creatures would, in general terms, be ennobled through the gentle agency of art! In fact we were told all sorts of things, which, perhaps, we did not believe, and which have, at all events, been proved by time to be not less fallacious than the great majority of predictions.

When the Canterbury Music Hall came prominently before the public, and set an example which has now been followed all over London—you may say all over England—the principal attraction which was put forward to catch the multitude was a musical selection from some well-known operatic work. The performance, we are free to confess, was somewhat coarse, but it was not wanting in a certain brilliancy and dash, and as there was one or two singers of passable merit engaged for these selections, we have no doubt but that with care and judgment the character of the entertainment might have been raised, and the taste of the public, as a natural consequence, improved.

Destiny has, however, willed it otherwise, and the Music Hall, as it at present stands, is mischievous to the art which it pretends to uphold. Operatic selections, it is true, are still to be heard, but they are, as a rule, so badly sung and vulgarly accompanied, that it were better for the cause of art that they should be omitted, and, in many cases, they appear to have died away—unheeded and unregretted—from the programme.

Nothing is listened to now-a-days but the so-called "comic songs," and, in sober earnestness, we must express our astonishment that human beings, endowed with the ordinary gift of reason, should be found to go night after night in order to witness such humiliating exhibitions. It is quite impossible to name anything equal to the stupidity of these comic songs, unless, indeed, it be their vulgarity. A man appears on the platform, dressed in outlandish clothes, and ornamented with whiskers of ferocious length and hideous hue, and proceeds to sing verse after verse, of pointless twaddle, interspersed with a blatant "chorus," in which the audience is requested to join. The audience obligingly consents, and each member of it contributes to the general harmony, a verse of the tune which he happens to know best. It not unfrequently occurs that one of the humorous efforts is received with perfect silence, and under such circumstances, it might not unreasonably be supposed that the artist would refrain, from motives of delicacy, from making his re-appearance before an audience to whom his talents do not appear to have afforded unqualified satisfaction. We are all, however, liable to be deceived, and no matter how slender the amount of the success achieved, the gentleman who occupies the chair will announce, in stentorian accents, that "Mr. So-and-So will oblige again"—which he accordingly proceeds to

do, in whiskers more alarming, and vestments, if possible, more hideous than on the previous occasion. This species of musical treadmill is continued until the exhausted singer has sung four songs, when (if he sternly refuses to sing any more) he is set free, and allowed to exercise, over other Music Halls, the improving influence of his talent.

It might be fancied, that in hearing a song from one of these hapless sons of mirth we must have reached the lowest pitch of jocular destitution; but this is not so, for, however deep the pain we endure from the male comedian, the suffering which we experience at the hands of the "serio-comic lady" is even harder to bear. Her very title is assuredly a misnomer, for there is naught of seriousness in her performance, whilst as for comedy—Heaven save the mark!—she knows not the meaning of the word! She appears on the platform and, with a saucy bearing and shrill voice, howls forth some ditty about "cards in the Guards," or some "swell in Pall Mall," or, perhaps, she will tell you a domestic romance in which omnibus conductors, or policemen, or costermongers, form the important features. Wanting, alike, in point, grace, or humor, these songs can have no purpose save to indulge the degraded taste of the majority of those who nightly fill the Music Halls; among such of the audience as have been attracted in the idea that they would hear a rational performance, there can be but one feeling—pity.

We would gladly refrain from attacking women, but in this case, we cannot be silent, for we are satisfied that these songs are not only very stupid but extremely mischievous in their results, and those who sing them must not claim at our hands any consideration on account of that sex, which they have outraged by such unseemly and unwomanly performances. Grace in a woman, like hope in the human breast, should linger when all else is gone, and it is because these "serio-comic ladies" possess no vestige of feminine refinement that we condemn them hopelessly and unreservedly.

Whilst on this subject, we are reminded, perhaps by contrast, of *Mdlle. Theresa*, the *diva* of the *Alcazar*, in Paris, and, so far as regards pointlessness and stupidity, we are bound in truth to say that our remarks have no reference to her; she possesses that which, in a different walk of life, might have enabled her to obtain a high position as an artist. As it is she is only a Music Hall singer—but such a one! No actor can see her, no musician can hear her, without marvelling at the rare amount of talent evinced by her. That her sphere of art is a low one—perhaps the lowest—no one will deny, but her pre-eminence in that sphere is also undeniable, and, at the risk of shocking some of our readers, we venture to think that many queens of song now before the public, whose names are cherished by lovers of the opera, will find themselves matched and outdone before *Mdlle. Theresa* meets her equal.

But let us leave the heroine of the *Alcazar*. In England there are numerous representatives of her faults, but we shall seek in vain for anyone who can afford the least idea of her merits. We had a twofold object in alluding to the Parisian *Café Chantant*, and although the French Music Hall is liable to reproach in certain matters, we think that some things might with advantage be transplanted in England. *Imprimis*, you will find in most cases, a trim little orchestra of

efficient performers, who rattle merrily through one or two overtures, a waltz, or a march, and so forth, and who, if need be, are fit to play a better class of music in fair style. There are generally singers of some pretension who are equal to the proper performance of romances and operatic airs, and, in short, the class of entertainment is such as reasonable folk may take pleasure in hearing. We wish that as much could be said for our Music Halls! Until, however, the entire organization of these places of amusement is remodelled, and until decent music and fair cultivation take the ground now occupied by buffoonery and vulgarity, no good result may be hoped for.

We have spoken our mind pretty plainly in this matter, and there are two and possibly more of these Music Halls which may not justly come under the strictures which we have passed upon the institutions in general. Of the exceptions which strike us, the *Alhambra*, with its well-mounted ballets and capital scenery, may be cited as one, whilst the music rooms known as *Evans's*, in Covent Garden, constitute the other. In the latter case, the audience consists of men alone, and the entertainment is made up of some glees, and part-songs, executed by a well-trained choir, in which will be found boys with fresh and lusty voices which it does one's heart good to hear. There was, it is true, a funeral comedian there, whose name, we fancy, was Mr. Harry Sidney, but if we are right, he has taken his talents elsewhere, and at *Evans's* the visitor will now chance to hear good music well executed. The establishment is admirably conducted, and as for the beaming proprietor, may his shadow never be less, and may his hospitable snuff-box never be empty!

It will be seen that we have not touched upon the more serious question of the evil influence exercised by the majority of Music Halls as they are now conducted, and we have purposely refrained from doing so. If the morality of a Briton is to be attacked, the best course is to make, in the first place, an appeal to his common sense. We have endeavored to point out the utter stupidity and worthlessness of the entertainments which are to be heard at these places all over London, and it remains for the public to contribute its quota towards a general reformation, so that, in time, the Music Hall may really furnish a home for music, instead of being, as at present, an insult to the art from which it has filched the name.

A RELIGIOUS journal complains that "the opera is fast getting the upper hand in our churches, and the ends of devotion are sacrificed to the demands of taste. A quartette perform in the orchestra, and the worshippers listen and criticise as spectators. As to knowing what sentiment or feeling is expressed by the choir, unless one has recourse to his hymn book, he is just as much in doubt as if the words were sung in Chinese or Choctaw."

MISS LOUISA PYNE's operetta troupe, in addition to Offenbach's "*Lisichen and Fritzchen*," are rehearsing for immediate production a new one act operetta written by Mr. F. Knight Summers, called "*Poor as a Rat*." Report speaks most favorably both of the music by Herr Kloss, and the originality of the plot of the libretto. The *dramatis personæ* consists of only three characters.