

RACHMANINOFF.

THE OPENING BRAND LANE CONCERT.

Rachmaninoff, like most of the great musicians who have visited Manchester since the war, had to be content with recognition from the greater public, as our musicians and the specifically musical public have no longer any means in their power by which they can indicate their veneration for a musician or his rank. To say that the public at the Brand Lane concerts accorded him an enthusiastic welcome would be to misstate the case. He had his welcome all right when he had shown by his playing and his music how richly he deserved it. Few artists have appeared at the Brand Lane concerts without a greater initiatory welcome than he. The cause lay partly in Mr. Rachmaninoff's own nature. He has the natural aloofness of the romantic nature. While his entrance is scrupulously formal and polite, it broke down no barriers, and Mr. Rachmaninoff was able to sit down at the piano alone with his art and with his colleagues, who were as silent as himself about it. In the whole evening he struck but one chord extraneous to his set music, and this chord was a secretive sound that might have come from an Æolian harp, but was really meant to banish any remnants of extraneous keys which might be hanging about when he began the first of his preludes. He did not cheapen his composition by precluding the prelude with a tour round the key, as too many players do when sitting down at the instrument. Mr. Rachmaninoff seemed of set purpose to eschew the genial. If there is any truth that the strange is essential to the romantic, then it is also true that the genial, which is meant to break down all barriers and dispel all sense of distance, is something opposed to romanticism. A Burns, who by an arrogant geniality brings freshness into the dead carcase of literature, is not a romantic in the sense of a Poe, a Chopin, or a Rachmaninoff. Rachmaninoff bestows no smile on his listeners, and the most banal of them will not venture to applaud as he hails the first notes of the famous prelude. The round of applause at the recognition of an expected encore is familiar at our Saturday night concerts, but the famous prelude might have been an unknown novelty for any special demonstration made even at its close.

The concerto proved worth all the rest of the concert put together. Sir Dan Godfrey conducted, and of all the concert he was most successful in this work. Possibly the players also were inspired with a special sympathy for the composer and by his own interpretation of the work. Hearing the composer play it, one was able to see with what art even the melodies of the work had been conceived with a view to elaborate figuration. The technique itself does not seem designed to impose itself on the listener's admiration. In his playing the composer seems wholly taken up with the desire for rectitude and justice of execution. There is no special air of spontaneity. The music is given a place, as it were, outside of himself, and is performed with the most fastidious sense. The master pianist is seen more often in a fascinating economy of tone, intensely vitalised, than in the excess of brilliance and the dazzling texture which one might think were the obvious points for admiration. The opening theme, of a mysterious ballad nature, was a marvel of such concentrated vitality. From the point where, in the last movement, the military nature of the music comes uppermost brilliance, of course, holds sway; but it is not without the insubstantiality which betokens the phantom nature of such pomp. Questioned on the poetic imagination in relation to music, Mr. Rachmaninoff was resolute in confessing nothing and in keeping the attitude of the pure musician. Yet even on that score we may suppose he would not deny the cadential nature of his famous prelude theme. That once admitted, a broad door is open for a great army of tragic interpretations. The jazz form he is supposed to like becomes but a grotesque upon a grave; the listener who hears in three notes Poe's Raven crying "Never more"; the one who hears in it and its possible variants "Es muss sein" or "Muss es sein"; or the one who, like another Dr. Crotch, would set all the clocks improvising on it through all the nights, are alike justified in their divinations of horror. To be an absolute musician in the non-poetic sense must, one may believe, be something different from being Mr. Rachmaninoff. Though Sir Dan Godfrey's handling of the concerto was so happy, for the rest he showed himself more a classical than a Straussian conductor. His "Unfinished Symphony" had a fine composure, and his "Leonora" Overture, so far as we heard it, was thoroughly sound. His Prelude from the "Mastersingers" had a brooding grandeur. His Chabrier was bright and realistic. Sir Dan takes after his son in being energetic with his arms, and in the "Don Juan" of Strauss this fact tended to a little overplaying, and the beauty of the string tone was dispelled.

S. L.

psychology and modern theology and relate the two he will find, in William James's words, "the further limits of our being plunge . . . into an altogether other dimension of existence from the sensible and merely understandable world."
—Yours, &c., T. WIGLEY.
Trinity Congregational Church,
Swinton, October 17.

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Sir,—I was surprised to read Dr. Wynne's sweeping assertion that the rationalist will feel only "contempt, amused or pitying," when he reads the accounts in the press of the Bradford Mission of Healing. I should imagine that any decent man, rationalist or orthodox Christian, would have difficulty in extracting amusement from such a source, and would be cautious in giving way to a feeling of contempt. For whom is the rationalist to feel contempt? Scarcely for the sufferers, whose only mistake can be that they are invited to follow too closely in the steps of the first Christians, and who, in any case, cannot justly be contemned for clutching at straws. Hardly for the "healer" unless he is to be branded as a conscious impostor, and even then the appropriate emotion would be not contempt, but hatred for one who should so trade upon human suffering. I submit that the intelligent rationalist will be otherwise occupied. The study of the relationship between mind and body will provide him with abundance of material for reflection, and he may come to the conclusion that influences at present beyond human control may possibly do much to alleviate human suffering.—Yours, &c., F. E. COX.
Lee Bank, Gravel Lane, Wilmslow.

To the Editor of the Manchester Guardian.

Sir,—So intemperate and cocksure a letter as that of the Medical Officer of Health for Sheffield in Friday's paper richly explains why the medical profession, in spite of all the benefits which it has conferred on humanity, has been and remains the most vulnerable target for satire. Is the spirit of trade unionism, then, so strong within the medical profession that, not content with excluding a Sir Herbert Barker, the Almighty Himself cannot be admitted as qualified to heal His own creatures?—Yours, &c., P.
Manchester, October 18.